May 1934

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Adventure

A long novel of mystery and jungle terror

BLACK DRUMS TALKING

by Gordon MacCreagh

also

W. C. TUTTLE

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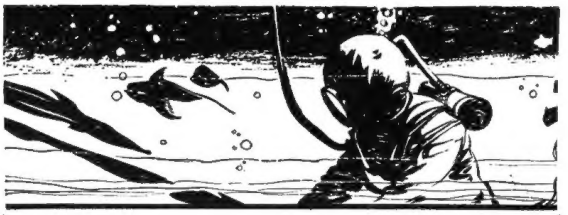

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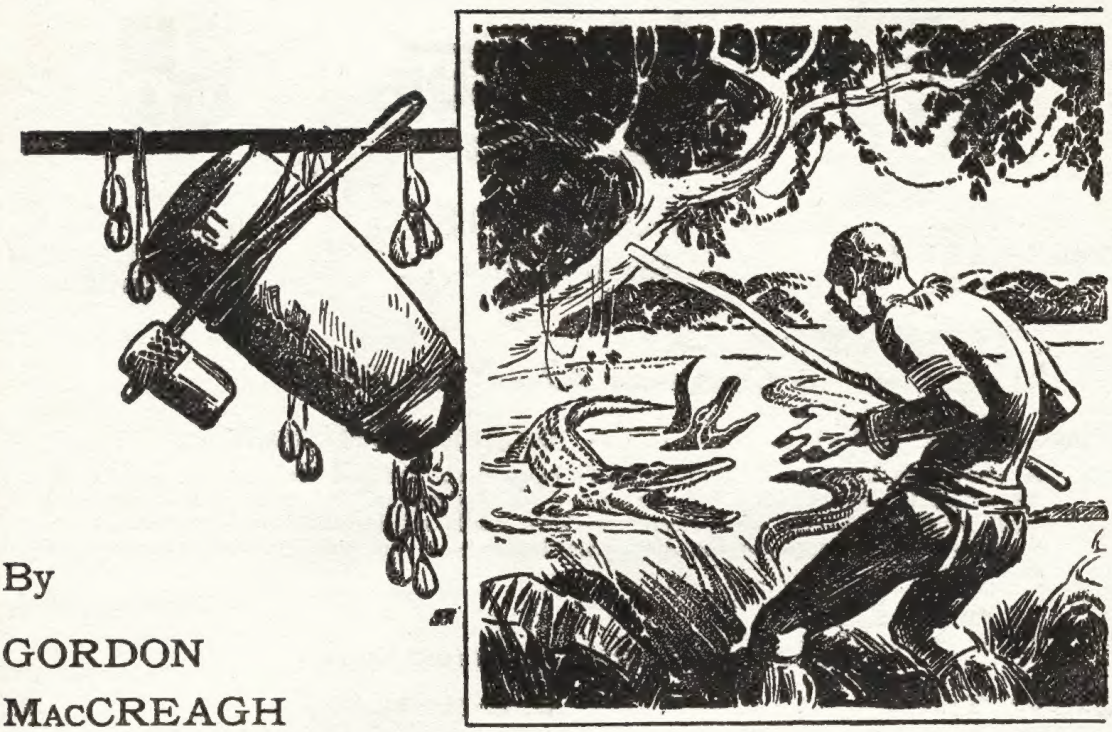


By

GORDON
MACCREAGH

BLACK DRUMS

KINGI BWANA'S safari wound like a monstrous snake through low, rolling hills of parched brown grass and dusty mimosa scrub—like a black snake with a swift, olive-drab head. Over a low rise came King, tall, khaki-clad, tireless, his face tan as his ragged shirt, his quick gray eyes scouting ahead from under his shapeless double terai-hat. At his heels trotted, like a dog—or rather like a well trained monkey—his wizened little Hottentot whose name was longer than all his shrunken body. Kaff'enk wa n'dhlovo, abbreviated even by his own tribe, who loved staccato, monosyllabic stanzas of names, to Kaffa.

Behind them in an undulating line hurried the Shenzie porters under light loads. And last of all a resplendent figure of a black man all decked out in leopardskin *moocha* and monkeyhair garters at knee and elbow. His great, sword-bladed spear and his nodding black ostrich plume showed him to be an *elmoran* of the Masai, a single-handed slayer of lions—and of men.

From time to time the Masai would utter a gruff shout of—

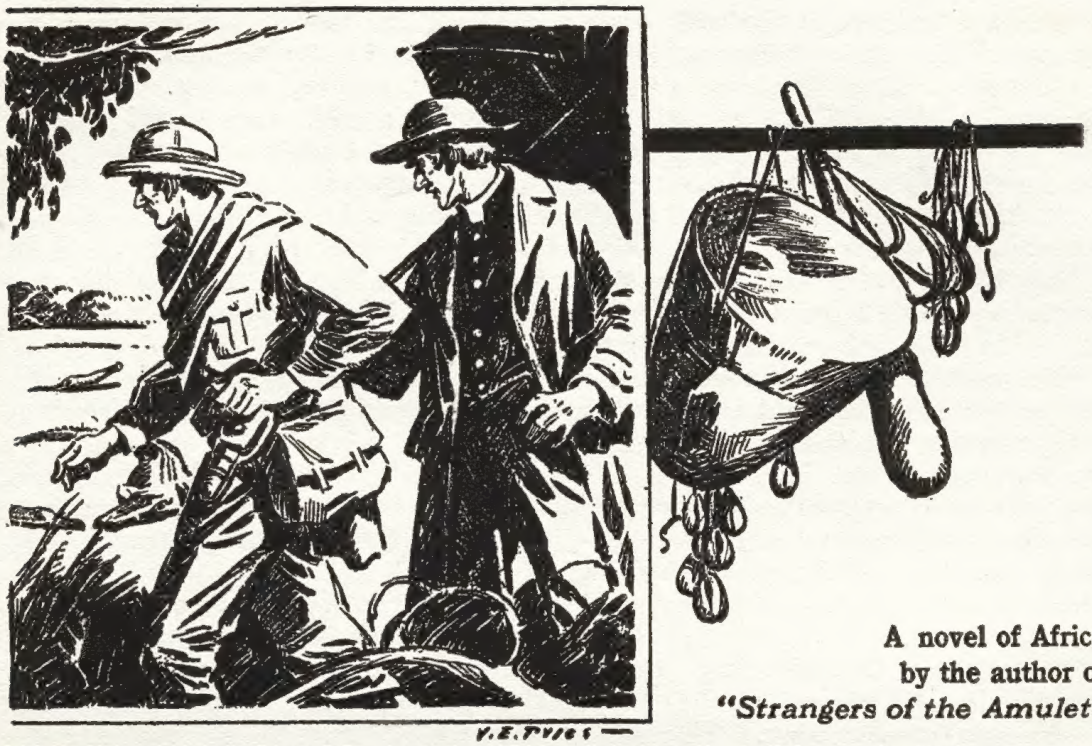
"Bado, m'panze, bado!"

Which was quite unnecessary, since the porters were keeping up splendidly with King's fast lead.

Anybody could see that the safari was hurrying on the home trek; and anybody who knew Africa could see why.

Brilliant clouds, as white and as hard edged as if cut out of paper, were piling up on the horizon. Within very few days the clouds would drift up to spread over the sky, and their clear cotton white would turn to gray, from gray to threatening purple-black. Then would come the rain. People who know Africa try to avoid being caught out on trek by the rainy season.

The sun, that had been doing its brazen damnedest, poised in the exact



A novel of Africa
by the author of
"Strangers of the Amulet"

TALKING

zenith throughout the whole day as tropical suns seem to have the power to do, began to drop. And having so decided, it fell as fast as a hot rivet, dull red in the dust haze.

King, squinting through narrow eyelids to right and left, pointed to one side with his rifle. The big Masai at the far end of the line barked orders. The black line of Shenzies swung over toward the thorn patch that King had indicated.

King and the Hottentot, without looking back, strode on and were quickly lost to view over the next low hill.

The Masai expertly marked out a rough circle with his steel-spiked spear butt where the labor of thorn bush clearing and piling up would be least. Under his growled directions a boma quickly began to grow. This was bad country.

The Shenzies chanted mournfully as they dragged the spiny, stunted mimosa trees to form a tangled wall. This was to be another dry camp. Water would be handed out by the gourd measure, just sufficient to every man's need. But African safari porters grumble when they can not be appallingly wasteful of everything, even of the turbid, befouled water of the ending dry season's waterholes. So with all armies on march.

There was no water-hole. King was not trekking a standard route, zigzagging from one hole to the next in easy stages. He was making a bee-line across country, and he camped wherever the nights caught him.

Presently the sound of a far shot drifted in on the still air; and quickly after it another.

"Haul" grunted the Masai. "There will be meat. Two bucks. In this country they will be *kongoni*. Let four men go, and swiftly."

When the four returned with King and the Hottentot—and sure enough with

two *kongoni* antelopes—the swift darkness was falling like a blanket. Within the boma, cooking fires smoked and stank under the profuse grease drip. The porters gorged themselves with meat, recklessly wasteful. They forgot about the water shortage and were happy.

Stars blazed overhead, but from the horizon line came low rumbles of thunder. The rain gods growling in their bellies, working up their rage for the fury of the monsoon, said the natives. Deep, moaning rumbles sounded nearby, awesomely close, yet impossible to locate with exactness. The windless air was filled with guttural sound. Somewhere out in the dark reverberated a series of vibrating roars which coughed away to silence.

"Better get the doorway thorns dragged in, Barounggo," said King. "Game was scarce today. They'll be hungry."

"It is done, bwana," boomed the voice of the Masai.

KING lay back with his hands folded under his head. The hard angles of his face were lighted in red outline by the glow from his pipe. Another far rumble throbbed across the night. King raised himself on his elbow to listen.

"What man among you can perhaps read that drum talk?" he asked.

The chattering of the porters ceased. They remained dumb—which is characteristic of African porters when speech is required. Fitfully the sound eddied and faded and surged in again.

"It will be a *ngoma*—a dance at some village," hazarded the Masai.

But the Hottentot, crouched like a blanketed gnome over the fire at King's feet, screwed up his face and clucked derisively.

"We passed no *shambas* by the way," he argued. "Nor, by the movements of the scattered game, was any village in that direction. Who then would dance in this empty country, unless it be the devils of the dust?"

King nodded toward him.

"Wisely spoken, apeling. It is no dance, but a talk. Can you of your experience read that talk?"

The Hottentot gathered his blanket closer around his shoulders.

"Nay, bwana. It is a talk that I do not know. But the skin within my belly is cold, by which sign I know that it is an evil talk."

The Masai's figure loomed immensely naked beyond the fire. His voice rumbled like a lion's.

"Evil walks always in the outer dark. But what is that to us? We are men; we are in boma; we have weapons. It is enough."

King knew that the Shenzie porters, huddled in the farther dimness, listened wide-eyed to every word; he knew, too, that panic came to porters more easily even than hunger. He nodded this time towards the Masai.

"Wisely spoken, warrior," he said. "In boma and armed. Let the outer evil walk where it will. It is no affair of ours."

Yet in Africa, where evil things are many, some things can force themselves most unexpectedly upon the affairs of people comfortably secure in a well constructed thorn boma.

With the suddenness of a rising sky rocket a scream cut into the normal noises of the night. Long drawn and wailing, it quavered and faded and rose again to a high shriek.

The Shenzie porters cowered.

"*Aie! Awowe!*" they moaned. "It is a bush devil that calls one to his death. Let the fires be fed and let no man venture forth."

But the little Hottentot, despite the coldness of his internal skin, was coolly alert.

"A fool," he said. "A fool who tells the lions where he is. Yet the trouble of a fool is none the less trouble." Already he was applying a match to the camp lantern.

King was on his feet, feeling in the

chamber of his rifle to assure himself that the load which he knew to be there was intact.

"Quick, Barounggo! Six men with spears. Both lanterns, Kaffa. And you take charge of the boma. Let nothing enter. Haul clear the doorway there. Each man armed? Come along."

Outside the boma the fires from within made a tangled tracery of shadows through the thorn branches; but within a few feet these merged into the darkness. Soon the party was swallowed up in the outer dark of the African night where there lurked bush devils and other things.

Certainly other things. Yellow-green spots of light, always in pairs, looked at them with the unwinking intensity of night creatures. Given time an opportunity for observation, an experienced hunter might attempt the supremely difficult feat of judging distances in the dark and then, from the space between the eyes, guessing whether the owners might be jackal or hyena or lion.

But there was no time for any such calculation now. No chance for anything but to rush straight ahead, making as much display of the lanterns and as much noise as possible, hoping that the creatures that stared so steadily might not be too hungry.

THE six conscripted Shenzies crowded on King's very heels, stepping upon his boots till he cursed them fiercely over his shoulder. Behind them, as always, came their herder, the Masai—which was the only reason why all the six had not shrunk back into the boma the moment that their leader had passed beyond the doorway. But they made up for their reluctance by the volume and quality of their yells.

Before the onrushing hullabaloo the staring eyes blinked, then swung away and disappeared. More than likely this diversion drew the attention of prowling beasts away from the human thing that wailed its grief into the open night. The big cats hunt as much by sound and sight as by scent.

Again the shriek split the air, closer now. The rescuers, stumbling through the hot night, chilled at the note of terror. Even King, as the wild screech rose out of the blackness ahead, felt a tingle along his spine, in apprehension of he knew not what.

"That," panted the Masai, "is the voice of a man whom the devils have caught." And a little later, as the sound quavered again into the higher atmosphere, "The voice, too, of a white man."

Yet the word that was distinguishable now was a native word.

"N'gamma!" it wailed. *"N'gamma!"*

And, *n'gamma,* whatever it might mean, seemed to be the focus of its fear.

"Hello!" yelled King. "Where away? Hold tight. We're coming."

But only, *"N'gamma!"* screamed back at them out of the dark.

And then a shape was apparent in the lanternlight. A shadow that ran on all fours like an ape, then rose and tottered forward on its hind legs and lurched and crawled again on hands and knees.

In another second they were up to it, surrounded it. Light from both lanterns in unsteady hands showed it clear.

"Lord!" gasped King. "A white man it is!"

He lifted the groveling creature, the weight hanging on his arms.

"Steady, old man," reassured King. "You're safe now. We'll see you through."

But the man only whimpered and averted his swollen eyes from the light, clawing away with an emaciated hand. And what a sight of a live human thing it was — rag-wrapped; thorn-gashed; knees and palms cut to raw shreds by gravel, sharp chips of which were still embedded in the pulp-like flesh. Every visible surface was a blood streaked mess of caked grime and sweat.

"Lord!" King stared at the man. "What new horror of Africa is this?"

Suddenly a spasm of renewed vitality

came to the sagging figure. It jerked upright.

"*N'gamma!*" it shrieked again, and fought to break away from the hands that held it.

The Shenzies shrank away.

"*Awo!*" they muttered. "Surely have the devils of the bush laid hands upon this one."

But the effort was soon spent. Panting and whimpering, the man hung in King's arms. King motioned with his head to the two sturdiest Shenzies.

"Make a chair with your joined hands," he snapped. "We must carry him back to camp. Quick."

IN THE boma, the Hottentot, wise in the unexpected ways of the bush, already had a can, one-third full of water, heating over a fire.

"Thirst is for tomorrow," he grunted. "But trouble is here tonight. See, bwana, the bandages are ready and I have taken the medicine box out of the pack."

King grunted a brief appreciation.

"It was well done. There will be a gift. Now lay out a blanket and help with the washing. Barounggo, if those Shenzies hold not the lanterns steady, beat their heads together."

The exhausted man struggled no more. He lay and moaned, now and then a tremor passed over his wasted body. As the encrusted blood and grime soaked away from the derelict's chest, a curious mark emerged and held King's eyes. A queer sort of crude design that had been smeared on with some yellowish ochre stuff: on each breast a circle with a dot in its center, and down over the abdomen a wavy line that divided at the navel and pointed away to each groin, like a crudely drawn inverted letter Y.

King raised his eyes, narrow and perplexed, to look into the round, simian orbs of the Hottentot. The little bush dweller screwed up his face and shook his head.

"I do not know this thing, bwana; yet it is in my belly that it is a mark of evil."

"And this word that he mutters?" asked King. "*N'gamma?* Is that known to you? Or anything like it?"

Again the Hottentot shook his head. King continued the washing and dressing of the innumerable wounds in frowning silence. When it was finally done the man was a mummy swathed in antiseptic bandage, torn trade cloth, and sticking plaster.

"If those Shenzies have left any meat, put a piece on to stew," ordered King. "Then sleep. I watch. Later I will wake you."

In the silent camp King stood on widespread legs and scowled into the night. Outside, throaty rumblings and snufflings circled the boma. Lambent lights in pairs stared at him out of the dark. Dull thunder grumbled. Fitfully the far drums talked their black secrets to one another.

"What mystery is this?" muttered King. "What hellish mystery of Africa?" And a little later, "Drum talk and a hunted man. Guess we'll know soon enough. They'll surely follow."

IN THE morning the man was still alive, which was surprising enough, considering what he had been through. The let-down after his terrific strain, of what must have been many days of privation, was upon him. He lay and moaned. At intervals a spasm contorted his face. Fear. Horror of something beyond human sanity.

King shrugged.

"Well, we can go no faster than we're going. Two days ought to see us at Archer's Post, and maybe there'll be a medico there. Barounggo, two men at a time in relays for a blanket hammock. Divide loads accordingly. *Bado-bado*—and trek."

That day was like the preceding one. Whirling dust devils and merciless sun and thorn scrub. Like many previous

days, except that the safari edged over to the westward off the straight line to pick up a water-hole somewhere along the Ol-Doinya foothills. Behind them drums still muttered to one another. King frowned into the heat haze.

The next boma was like the last. King personally saw to it that it was a particularly strong one. The drums that had been talking all across the horizon seemed to be converging upon the camp. King whistled tunelessly through his teeth and directed that half a dozen large piles of dried thorn and débris be gathered in a circle thirty or forty yards outside the little fortress.

The darkness closed down, and, unlike the previous night, the drums seemed to have said all that they had to say and were silent. King smiled thinly. The Masai squatted over a fire that threw red highlights and ebony shadows upon his great muscles as with a small whetstone he stroked the long blade of his spear. Far away the thunder grumbled.

After a long silence King spoke.

"Have the Shenzies each man his shield and spear?"

"It is done bwana. They will fight, for they are afraid."

At last it came. Jackals howled to one another—the demoniac low and high notes of gray-backed jackals.

"And that," said the Hottentot, "is foolish. For here are no gray-backed jackals."

"By which sign," added King, "we may know that those drum talkers have followed their man far; strangers, otherwise they would know. Douse fires within," he told Barounggo, "and send a man out to set light to those prepared piles of thorn."

But the Shenzies huddled together and chattered, clinging to one another like so many monkeys for protection. No man dared to venture out into the dark where there was a most mysterious kind of menace.

With superb disdain the Masai plucked his standing spear from the ground. Unhurriedly he stooped to pick up a brand and with a magnificent swagger stalked out and made the circuit of the stacked woodpiles. He knew that King with ready rifle covered his march. But so had the Shenzies known it. That was the difference between one man and another.

King grinned through tight lips as the bonfires blazed up. Within his own boma, shadowed by the interlaced thorn, was darkness. In the outskirts of the outer glare he could see figures flitting between the bushes.

Now a queer quirk of King's character, hard and efficient as he was in all his dealings with the difficult problem of the African in reasonless emotions, was that he hated to resort to the white man's ultimate argument of guns.

"They're just dumb fools," he maintained. "Barely descended from the trees. A swift kick in the tail or just the right kind of hokum, according as circumstance and opportunity demand. It will always bring them around grinning."

But here was no opportunity for the persuasive psychology of a stiff boot well placed to the nether loincloth. King was no sentimentalist about his theories. He knew very well that people who came as did these furtive forms in the night came for war, and he knew the persuasive phychology of the first move in a war.

One unwary figure was too slow in dodging between bushes in its advance. King snapped up his rifle and fired. The man flung up his arms and pitched into the thorn bush.

These strangers who had come from some far place behaved as no East African tribe that King knew would have. They did not yell, and gather to adjust their minds to the suddenness of it, to shout encouragement to one another, to work up the necessary rage for attack. They did yell; but with their first shout they charged in to the attack.

"*Whau!*" grunted the Masai. "These be good people. Shenzies, let no fool throw a silly spear. Thrust through the thorn barrier."

It was by that simple defence that the attack was broken. The horde of dark forms surged up to the boma. But stiff acacia thorns are as effective a barrier against naked savages as ever was barbed wire against khaki clad soldiers. Around the boma dark shapes pranced, howling the typical demoniac accompaniment of African fighting.

Thrown spears flicked over the thorn wall. But they were without aim. Within the enclosure was darkness. The leaping shapes were clearly outlined against the outer circle of bonfires. From the inner darkness spears licked out at them. Blood spurted, shiny as dark oil. Yells of attacking fury were interspersed with yells of sudden pain. King deftly slung his rifle over his shoulder. His Luger pistol spat viciously. Leaping shapes writhed or lay still.

IT WAS a strong defence. But the attackers, as the Masai had said, were good people. A group of them snatched off their loincloths, and, stark naked in the fire glow, wrapping their hands, they set to dragging away a section of the thorn barrier. Half a dozen interlaced thorn bushes began to tear away in a series of jerks under the strong tugs. One of the group started a grunting chant as with a will they heaved together. If that section were torn clear there would be a breach at which numbers would count. Inside, Shenzies clawed madly to hold the barrier in place.

King shouted at them. But in their unreasoning fear his voice only added to the dark pandemonium. With arms and legs he fell upon his own men from behind, and kicked and cuffed at them indiscriminately, till they shrank away, jabbering.

"Kaffa," he ordered then, "the shotgun here. Step well back. Let it spread all it can."

The twelve-bore roared out. The bunched group beyond the thorns fell away, shrieking.

The defence—the strong boma with an outer ring of light—had been prepared with an experience that these attacking strangers, good men though they were, found to be beyond all their expectations.

"Bwana." The Masai's eyes showed white; his nostrils were twitching wide. "Bwana, they waver. A charge now with shield and spear will catch them in their fear and will slaughter many."

"So speaks Kifaru the rhinocerous who has little sense," said King. "But another weapon is given to us."

Little blazes, offspring of the bonfires, were beginning to flare among the dry bunch grass. The lesser blazes began to meet in a flickering line. The attackers looked behind them. King watched with hawk eyes.

"Kaffa, give me that shotgun."

A few charges of No. 4, sprayed wherever there seemed to be anything like an organizing group, were a devastating argument. Isolated from one another, the attackers' hot courage waned. Dark forms began to leap back over the spreading line of flames. Shrill whistles of recall sounded. Black shapes raced past, bounding high like frightened bucks, to join the others before the fire should grow too wide.

King grinned mirthlessly.

"Take note, Barounggo, that wit must be added to courage. Had these men had any, they would have gathered on the windward side of our fires instead of senselessly in the direction from which they came. Take men quickly now outside the boma and stamp out fires that creep toward us from the other side."

The soft night wind blew with persistence. In a little while the boma was a dark island with little waves of fire flowing past it on either side. Beyond was a widening sheet of flame and sullen, red, low-hanging smoke.

King peered out at the scene with

critical eyes.

"I guess that's that—" he grunted—"though if they are wise they can backtrack and close in as the embers cool. Barounggo, take those Shenzies by the ears and tell them that it was well fought. To each man there will be a blanket. And swift now. Get the wounded who lie outside into our boma for whatever protection it may offer the poor devils. We have won the first fight and a breathing space of time. Uploads then, and a hard all-night trek. It seems that it is his fate to win free—this white man whom the drums have followed so far."

AT ARCHER'S POST life still remained in the man who had been the object of that relentless pursuit. His mind still wavered on a borderland of some horror that had driven it into the outer blankness.

The young medico at the post complimented King on his emergency first aid.

"He'll owe his life to your poisonous trade cloth bandages, if he pulls through. And he may—he must have had incredible stamina. I suppose you have no idea how long he was out, or where from?"

King shook his head.

"Must have been days. A long succession of ghastly days with the drums driving him on. Is he talking any?"

"Only that word, *n'gamma,* or whatever it is, and he mutters something about those painted symbols. 'Dedicated', he mumbles, and then he escaped."

King scowled into the far nothing.

"Dedicated, eh? Some hellish juju stuff he must have run into. Must have busted right into their secrets or they wouldn't have kept after him so hard." He strode a short turn up and down the room, thumbs hooked in his belt, head forward, frowning. A twisted smile tightened his mouth. "And I suppose I inherit a choice dose of voodoo vengeance for snatching him out of it. Well, that's Africa. Who around here knows anything about cults up north? That drum talk was new to all my people."

"Nobody knows much. North of Uasu Nyiro River is pretty well back of beyond. And I'm afraid—" the doctor shook his head soberly—"I'm very much afraid our patient will never tell us. Whatever it was has been a terrible strain on his reason. The fever is coming on him. I'm wondering whether we'd better put him in a car and rush him down to Nairobi where there'll be ice, or whether the jolting over the veldt trails will be worse for him than staying here. It's a devilish fix for a man as sick as he."

"There are many devilish things in this country," said King darkly. "If you take him down I guess I'll come along. If he ever talks I'd like to know for my own sake."

IN NAIROBI a military attaché, immaculately incongruous in the hotel where traders and white hunters congregated, waited upon King. No less a personage than the governor desired to have speech with him.

"O-ho, so he's a somebody!" was King's instant conclusion. "What does the governor want to know?"

But the attaché knew nothing, or at all events would say nothing. Whatever was on the governor's mind, his Excellency would communicate if he saw fit.

King grinned at the official formality and went along. The governor dismissed the faultlessly dressed secretary and regarded with quizzical thoughtfulness the tall brown figure in rough shirt and riding breeches. He knew King of old, and King knew him. The attitude between the two men was one of friendly disagreement on almost every subject.

"And what trouble have you picked up now, Kingi Bwana of the wild places?" was the governor's character-

istic opening.

King shook his head.

"Hanged if I know, Governor Bwana. It's a dark mystery to me."

"Honest? You don't know anything more than you reported to Archer's?"

King grinned at the implication.

"Not a thing—this time. Cross my heart. I picked the man out of the night, and nothing that he has babbled since has enlightened me."

"Hmh! Well, sit down. I'm going to ask you to take on one of these jobs that you're always refusing."

King's expression became obstinate. He disliked official assignments. His whole soul revolted from their encumbering red tape and the ponderous tedium of their reports.

"Now this is confidential, Kingi."

King nodded in silent agreement. The governor was serious.

"The man is dying. He will never enlighten us—his mind won't recover in time. If you know nothing his case will remain one of the dark mysteries of Africa—unless you can find out."

King made no sign of acquiescence. He waited to hear more.

"The man," said the governor slowly, "is a guide and safari conductor of wide experience. An ex-soldier, in Africa since the War. A first class man. He was one of a confidential mission that we sent out to discover, if possible, evidence about the constantly recurring complaints about Abyssinians raiding slaves across our borders."

"Aa-ah!" King was immediately antagonistic. "The old imperial policy. Anything that happens along the border, blame the Abyssinians for it. Somebody stands up in Parliament and clamors for indemnity."

"Yes, yes." The governor nodded amiably. "I know you think that everything we do is just another move toward the acquisition of more territory. But I'm afraid, I'm very much afraid, my dear Ethiophile, that in this case our men must have found the evidence."

"Listen, Governor Bwana." King was positive. "I've got friends among the Abyssinians; they may be black men, but they've treated me white. Let me assure you that the new Abyssinian law imposes the death penalty for slave raiding. And figure it out for yourself: no Abyssinians could ever have chased this poor devil so many days through British territory; no East African tribe could have chased him through the country of other tribes. There's only one explanation. Your mission ran into some high juju stuff. Only a secret cult gang could pass tribal borders that way."

The governor was one of those officials who had won to his position through long service in Africa, not through the fortune of blue-blood. He understood Africa and African needs—though always from the imperial viewpoint—better than King would have thought possible. He frowned thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you are right. We may be much more deeply involved than for a few black slaves. If it's juju there's hysteria with it. Tribal uprisings have started from less. But we *must* have information, accurate and reliable information, before we can crush the thing in its inception."

"Aa-ah." King breathed understanding. "So you offer me the sweet job of sticking my nose into whatever devilry of African imagination it was that overtook your mission and drove this other fellow shrieking crazy through the night—to say nothing about their being a heap of territory along your Abyssinian border, and very presently it's going to rain a whole lot over all of it."

"Kingi Bwana," said the governor seriously, "we've got to follow up this trail while it is hot. You know Africa. You know how quickly the most murderous happening can be buried in native secrecy and remain a dark mystery forever. We must trace this thing to its source; and if there has been murder or treachery there must be swift retribution."

Cynicism hardened King's wide mouth.

"Yeah, retribution. Military police. Machine guns. That's the history of Africa. I don't hold with shooting up the dumb fool African just because he's been an African fool."

"My dear Kingi—" the governor spoke with the conviction of all imperial policy behind him—"British lives must be protected in our farthest borders. British prestige must be upheld. That is our undeviating principle that affects every white man in the country."

"Yeah?" King's own principle was sacrilege to imperial tradition. "I'm strong for the principle of top dog. But in my home state of North Dakota a man's prestige is exactly as good as he can hold up with his own two hands, and if he rides into somebody else's range and gets into trouble that's his personal hard luck. Who all was the rest of this secret mission that's so important to British prestige?"

The governor looked into King's stubborn face with a wintry smile.

"Just one other man," he told him slowly. "Sir Henry Ponsonby. The man you found was his orderly."

"The devil you say!" King's whole expression changed. "Ponsonby was—*is* too good a man to fool away his time on any wild goose chase after a slave rumor. Governor Bwana, if it was Ponsonby who went up he's quite likely to be marooned in some juju den, holding his end up with a stiff grin and packing more white man's prestige in his own two hands than a whole platoon of military police. And you can't turn the constabulary loose on a case like that. This juju stuff needs to be handled with kid gloves, else there are killings and general hell to pay. You know that."

The governor's smile was almost undignified enough to be a grin.

"Kid gloves, do you say? I have been informed, my Kingi, that your method was a stiff cowhide boot. But since even that is preferable to what you so aptly describe as general hell to pay, I shall make you a concession that will upset the whole system of our colonial government. I shall instruct the comptroller of accounts to pass your expense sheets—scribbled as they will be upon scraps of wrapping paper and what not—and to honor them without question."

King was blasphemous.

"To hell with your system of colonial government! But listen, Governor Bwana—Personby owes me pretty nearly three dollars on a shooting bet. If I should go slopping around in the rain to collect I'd need letters to all outposts to requisition supplies and relay porters to relieve my own when they'd stick in the mud and die. And I'd need a game law waiver—water-holes being flooded and game scattered—to shoot whatever I could get for safari meat whenever I needed it. I'd need a double fly tent and porter tents and half a ton of quinine and tarpaulin covers and slickers and—oh, hell, a twenty-man load of dude outfit."

The governor's smile was now undisguisedly a grin.

"I knew you would need all of that and an armed escort besides. In the circumstances I think your bet is worth collecting. I have already signed a blank requisition for you upon military police stores. When do you start?"

KINGI BWANA'S safari was once again at the place where the cry of gray-backed jackals had signaled the determined but ill-judged attempt to recapture a man whose reason had left him, but who still might know too much of things that white men must never know.

But this was a very different safari. Tents glistened wetly in the light of the sputtering fires. A huddle of narrow, steep-sided shelters fit only for a dog and aptly named pup tents; and a trim green one with a wide double fly under the eaves of which, raised from the ground on logs, were stacked boxes and bales. A tarpaulin covered another pile of lumpy shapes. There was no thorn boma. There were men enough to stand

an all-night guard. Fifteen were *askaris* pure and simple, men who carried no pack loads save rifles of an outmoded military pattern which they could shoot off with a lot of noise and whose united front looked very formidable.

King would just as lief have dispensed with these noisy bravos who always caused envy and discontent among humble Shenzie beasts of burden. But since they were pressed upon him at the expense of his Majesty's imperial government, he shrugged and said to Barounggo, the safari driver—

"At least these be fifteen strong men; and when the strength of our porters fails in the clinging mud—"

The Masai placed a great hand over his mouth to cover a chuckle like the rumble of a lion and completed the thought:

"Out of our own good porters have we made not-so-bad fighting men, thou and I together, bwana. Surely then, when the more obstreperous of these not-so-good fighting men have eaten stick, can we make not-so-bad porters out of them?"

But it was a strong safari. King knew better than anyone in Africa what he was deliberately going into, and he was prepared for it. He knew that he was going into something that nobody knew. Africa at its darkest. Something that had swallowed up one white man because he came too close. Something that had driven another one crazy. And the latter had escaped from the immediate horror only because he had been a man of wide African experience, a first class man—a man perhaps as good as King himself.

There would be first the blank wall of honest ignorance: actual lack of knowledge on the part of the great dumb majority. There would be, when one finally penetrated closer to the mystery, the ox-dull stubbornness of people who knew something but lived in superstitious terror of it themselves and dared not even speak about it. With silence there would be the age-old defences of Africa against the white man—obstruction, underground intimidation, boycott on food supplies, queer sicknesses. And there would be, if one survived and persisted in trying to penetrate yet farther, Africa implacable, savage, diabolically ingenious in keeping hidden the sinister things that are African.

Soberly, and with a very hard expression, King led his safari through country that was new to him, scouting around in the neighborhood where he had picked up the crazed orderly. The caravan squelched through a sticky mud that less than a fortnight before had been the deep dust of the dry season. The procession was not now in a long snaky line, as it had come over that path, for each following man would but tread deeper into the sucking puddle left by the feet of his predecessor. Spread out like a line of skirmishers the men went, each one picking the best ground he could find.

It was the duty of the Masai, helped —for the present—by the *askaris,* to see that no man resorted to the simple African trick of dropping his load behind a thorn bush and slinking away out of the clammy wet to the shelter of the nearest native village.

Later on, when the safari would come into the really wild country of unfamiliar tribes—wherever that direction might turn out to be in this morass of nonexistent clues and obliterated paths—no persuasion or beating would drive a man of them beyond sight of the bwana whose white prestige protected them.

"From the direction of the sun's left side came the drum talk that pursued that man," said King. "Somewhere in that direction will be a village, and somewhere near the village a witch doctor. Perhaps I have that which will induce him to talk."

It was on the second day of the mire that the Hottentot pointed to the unmistakable signs of Africa in a donga whose steep sides they skirted. And "days" as applied to travel in this weather meant, not the twenty miles or

so that King with his customary light safari covered, but a bare eight or ten. The donga, two weeks ago a dry sandy gash that twisted across the plain, was now ten feet deep with turbid water in which floated scraps of thatch and splinters of wood, the débris of a hut, and the carcass of an undernourished cow.

It happened every year. The rain came in its fury, the deluge tore away great slices of overhanging bank and with them huts, cattle byres, everything built too close; and every year Africa, callous, without thought, rebuilt in just the same feckless manner as it had always built.

IT WAS a big village, the usual sprawling mess of mud-and-thatch huts. The rain had lasted just long enough to wash away the accumulated smells of appalling African insanitation. King told the Masai to let the men run free to indulge in a holiday of the chitter-chatter and gossip of the road that is dear to the native heart.

In matters requiring wit rather than brawn it was the shrewd little Hottentot who served as a go-between for dealings that were not usual to white men. To him King gave an old brier pipe the bowl of which had been carefully carved with an intricate design.

"Go, little apeling," he told him, "and ferret out the witch doctor. Tell him that the Old One of Elgon cut that pattern. Perhaps this wizard is not so far but that he can read it and will exchange wisdom for a gift of a good blanket of many colored stripes."

The Hottentot returned in due course carrying the pipe wrapped in a banana leaf as an object worthy of reverence.

"It is a great magic in that pattern, Bwana. For the *tagati*, having seen it, was immediately well disposed. And, moreover, bwana—" the little man stood on one leg and clicked his tongue in awesome excitement—"he owns a *lebasha*, a finder of lost things, and he will let him turn his eyes into the darkness for you."

"A *lebasha*, hm? That's a hokum that I've heard of but have never yet seen. This may be interesting."

King was ruminative as he picked out a gaudy blanket from the trade goods. He numbered the ancient Wizard of Elgon among the first of the black men who had treated him white. That old pipe bowl, carved with whatever symbol it was of witch doctory, had won him entry to many things that white men never saw. This was going to be a new one.

The *lebasha*, he knew, was a clairvoyant, who by magical processes could be endowed with the scent of a bloodhound and could then pick up trails or trace stolen articles to the very door of the robber. What made the hokum interesting was that King knew certain unbelievable stories of such articles having been found. By all means the *lebasha* might prove to be worthwhile.

The magician lived in a clearing a mile away from the village. The tortuous path to it was hung with witch signs: skulls of animals; pointers; warning marks; grass curtains that nobody would dare to pass across the path. But these were now drawn aside. The symbols on the pipe bowl had opened the road for the white man.

The witch hut was surrounded by a thorn boma festooned with the usual emblems of magic—bones and snake-skins and dried embryos of unborn creatures, all the gruesome claptrap dear to African superstition. At the entrance stood an ebony figure, as stiff and as motionless as a statue carved out of the same wood and as naked as an idol except for a maze of painted designs. Only moving white eyeballs showed that the man was alive.

King looked keenly at the paint-smeared design. No leopard spots or wavy lines there. The cult that he sought was not there. But information that might lead to it perhaps would be.

King passed through the gateway.

The Hottentot groveled after him. Within the hut, an enormous megaphonic voice boomed—

"*Jambo, bwana m'kubwa,* who has the favor of the Old One of Elgon."

King smiled a little grimly. He was too old a hand, he told himself, to be impressed by any skullduggery. Yet the performance that he now witnessed left him wondering.

The hut was illuminated only by such light as came through the low door, and by a tiny fire of cowdung on the bare mud floor that smoked acridly and hurt the eyes. A blanket-muffled figure squatted on a three-legged stool almost in the embers.

King knew the ceremonies of calling upon magicians. He stayed on one side of the fire and passed his gift through the smoke. The wizard took, but did not inspect it. He was shrewd enough to know that a man who knew so much of the proper etiquette would know enough to bring a proper gift.

A stool was in readiness on the near side of the fire. King squatted upon it.

"I come, wise one, seeking knowledge of a word and of the trail from where that word came."

"So much bwana's servant has told me, but the word he has not said. The seer into the dark is ready, the magic drink is ready. What is given to him to smell out shall be smelled."

The wizard grunted an order, and out of the farther gloom of the hut shuffled a youth. A thin, anemic looking creature with a witless look in his eyes and a nervous affliction that twitched one side of his face. The wizard raked a pot from the embers and poured from it into a gourd a liquid that stank of dead things.

King watched with cold criticism.

The boy squatted, gulped down the liquid and shivered. The wizard stroked his face with tense fingers and muttered incantations. The boy began slowly to rock on his heels. King saw that his eyes rolled upward in their sockets till only the yellowish whites were visible.

The Hottentot moaned in awe at the workings of black magic. King, coldly skeptical, commented to himself—

"Hm, a neurotic type, a narcotic drink and some sort of hypnotism."

The boy ceased his rocking motion and sat back stiffly at an impossible angle, breathing stertorously.

The wizard drew away his fingertips as if tenuous threads were attached to each. He whispered:

"He has gone into the place where the dead thoughts of men are stored. His eyes see into the darkness. Let bwana ask now what he will know."

"Ask him," said King, "whether he knows the word—*N'gamma.*"

It was not the entranced boy at whom King looked. He watched the wizard keenly. But if the latter knew anything about the word whose significance had driven a man crazy he kept his composure with an astounding coolness. It was upon the boy that its effect was surprising.

He whimpered like a dog and cowered on all fours. He gave the exact impression that if he had a tail he would have tucked it between his legs.

"Ha!" said the magician. "He has found the word. It is a word of fear. He will smell out the trail to the place of that fear."

The boy breathed deeply; sniffed, in fact. Then suddenly he made a throaty barking noise for all the world like a dog, and scurried out of the hut.

"Come," said the magician. "We must follow fast."

THE boy ran in a queer, dead sort of way, his head lolling forward, his body limp. King, catching up with him, noted with a distinct shock that his eyes were still turned up in his head. Like a sleepwalker the boy ran, seeing nothing, guided by some queer subconscious sense, avoiding obstacles and trees by inches. At intervals he threw up his head and barked.

In a straight line the extraordinary trail ran, for some two miles, till a donga intersected the path, filled of course with rushing, turbid water. At the donga's edge the boy stopped and howled mournfully.

Still he pointed with his hand in the exact direction of his course. Then he fell down and lay gasping and twitching in a convulsion.

King knew that it was said of a *lebasha* that in his assumed characteristic of a hound he could not follow a trail across running water; that at a stream the magic power left him.

"It is finished," said the wizard. "He can go no farther. Yet there where he points is the true trail, bwana. That is all. In this matter I can do no more."

King walked back to his camp through the thin drizzle, his head sunk on his chest, wondering.

"And what, wise little apeling, do you make out of all that?" he asked the Hottentot.

The little man shivered.

"It is a great magic, bwana!"

That night a drum tapped rhythmically. Fitfully it throbbed into the dark. It stopped. Then repeated. Then stopped again. Then repeated once more.

"And of that what do you make?" King asked of the little man who shivered in his blanket.

"Nay, bwana, it is a drum talking," said the Hottentot. "Of it I make nothing. Only it is not the same talk that those other drums spoke." Curiously the little bush dweller, so astute in other things, when magic was in the air remained truly African, foolish, frightened, witless.

"I make of it," muttered King, "that this wizard was in so far honest that this word of fear has no significance for him.

"He is not of that dark cult. Yet, true to the brotherhood, he taps information for such as may have interest to know that a white man comes seeking. There will be trouble on that trail."

IT WAS a credit to King's organization of his safari that with the morning's start only one man was missing. It was to be expected that on any hard and unpleasant trek men would desert at an opportunity like this in a comfortable village.

But the Masai took it as an affront upon his personal honor that even one man should have gotten away. He shouted threats and raged through the village, dragging frightened men out of their huts, shaking his great spear in their faces, and promising death and dismemberment if the fugitive were not delivered.

But to no avail.

"Let him go," said King. "Time is more valuable than one man. Give his load to an *askari*."

That was another source of shouting and argument. They were fighting men, screamed the *askaris;* they would not stand by and see one of their number reduced to the low estate of a burden carrier. It was exactly as had been foreseen.

The Masai charged in among them like a raving lion. They shrank from his fury.

"Fighting men?" he growled at them throatly. "Who among you is a fighting man? Let him stand forth and speak. Lo, I will fight him; shield to shield and spear to spear. Or, if he has a brother, let the twain stand forth. Or if a cousin or relative, let the family stand forth together against an *elmoran* of the Masai and let us see who has knowledge of fighting!"

Magnificent in his wide-flung challenge, tall ostrich plume and monkey-hair elbow-garters flying in the wind, the great fellow glared at them. His eyeballs rolled white; his nostrils twitched; the white scars of a hundred battles showed upon his chest and arms.

Of all fifteen *askaris*, no man, no family, showed any eagerness to put their claims to so heroic a test.

"So?" snorted the blood-hungry one.

"Then we can talk. Thou, loud mouthed one." He took the selected man by the throat and shook him. "Thine is the burden today. Tomorrow it falls to the lot of the next loudest."

King affected not to notice all this.

"Up, up!" he called. "Up loads and away! What is this bickering? Time passes and the way is long before us. Up and trek."

He strode ahead. He knew that the safari would follow. A boy showed him the ford across the donga. He followed down on the other side to a point opposite to where the *lebasha* had fallen to the ground after his weird performance. From there he set a compass course.

"Since no other trail is known to us," he said to the Hottentot, "this at least is a direction."

So in that direction he led the way. The safari strung out behind him, picking the best ground available.

Hardly a mile had they progressed when King stopped suddenly. A clucking noise of dismay escaped from the Hottentot. What lay on the trail was no sight for panicky porters. King threw up his hand and shouted back:

"Here is quicksand. Let the men make a circle to the right—a wide circle. Let no man approach this bad ground. Barounggo, come here and see."

The safari swung away in a detour. The Masai splashed up through the puddles, wondering what need his master had to show him a quicksand in a country where there were thousands of quicksands.

"Not a quicksand," said King. "But we've found your lost man."

The Masai looked and started. Instinctively he lowered his spear and crouched ready to meet an attack. But there was no hostile force in sight, no lurking figures behind bushes. Only a man, the porter who had been missing that morning. He lay face up in the thin rain, naked, his arms stretched out as if crucified on the sticky ground.

In dry weather the hyenas would have nosed him out before dawn. The steady rain flattened the scent. The body was therefore intact and the yellow clay design stood clear against the sodden black skin. A crude leopard spot on each breast and down the belly a line that divided to point to each thigh.

King's voice was hard.

"This is no thing for the eyes of the Shenzies," he said. "But you two, who have made many safaris with me, my right hand and my left, what counsel have you to offer in this matter?"

He wanted to know right then and there whether superstitious terrors of black magic were undermining the courage of his henchmen, without whose loyal support he might as well turn back from this sinister thing to which he had put his hand.

His right hand and his left. Both men's eyes shone. There were times over late camp-fires when they argued with endless acrimony as to which one was right and which left. Never could they agree, and shrewdly King never told them.

"You, apeling, who have wisdom in the ways of the bush, what say you?"

The Hottentot stood on one foot and scratched his knee with the toes of the other.

"Bwana," he rendered his well considered verdict, "this is no witchcraft here; but the doing, as we know by this mark, of fierce men from a far place. Of men moreover—" he grimaced with the preternatural wisdom of a very old chimpanzee— "of evil men who have that which they wish to hide; otherwise they would not leave a sign such as this to frighten us from the trail. And when a secret is hidden—" monkey inquisitiveness chuckled from his wizened face —"it is honor to him who has the wit to find it out."

There was no suggestion of turning back from this trail that gave its stark warning that this was a phase of Africa not to be meddled with. King ruffled his hand through the little man's woolly hair, at which he, suddenly shy, chit-

tered away like a marmoset.

"And you, warrior?" King turned to the other.

"Nay, bwana," said the great fellow simply. "Shall strange bush pigs do this to an *elmoran?* Painter folk who smear designs with colors. Shall such people slay one of my Shenzies and go unscathed? Let bwana give his order, and the safari shall proceed."

King stood scowling down at the dead thing that had been laid out in his path. Perplexity furrowed two deep lines in his forehead.

"I have never heard of any leopard society this far east," he mused. "And the leopard cultists don't paint; they use steel claws. What in all black deviltry is the meaning of this mark?"

Questioning the empty air brought no light to the enigma. King shrugged.

"At least it means that that queer hypnotized creature was right, that this is exactly the direction that we want to go. Let's go."

That was the only clew. A direction, no more. But a direction given by black magic and confirmed by a dead man. King held his compass to it.

THERE followed days of dreary tramping through the slush. Progress was wretchedly slow. Long detours had to be made to find fords across the flooded dongas. Actual distance gained was sometimes barely a mile in a long day's hard going.

Porters fell sick. African natives, who are capable of enduring privation and poor food under heavy loads when engaged on their own futile affairs, revel in the luxury of sickness in a white man's safari.

Patiently King dosed them—a long line of complaints every morning. Quinine and cathartics were the stock prescriptions. King made them as nauseating as a Nairobi chemist had taught him. The men engulfed them and liked them. Medicine in all the horrible and revolting brews of native quackery was their heritage and was good for them in strict ratio to the price extorted by the quack. Free medicine at the hands of a white man was a luxury, and the whole staff vied for it accordingly.

Without the dosage their susceptible minds would have magnified their vaguely imagined ills into honest cramps and gripings. Discontent, sullen conviction of persecution and general disorganization would have ensued. So King held daily clinic and fretted for the squandered time.

Villages were few and far between. This was sparsely settled country. In the villages no information was to be picked up. Here was the blank ignorance that King had expected. To the stupid Algain tribesmen the word *N'gamma* meant nothing. And King hardly hoped to be able to work a witch doctor again. But he persisted on his compass course. That stark warning at the beginning had been evidence that he was aiming right; and no other course, no clew, was available.

There was some small compensation. The rain, after the first fury of the monsoon burst, slackened to intermittent downpour and drizzle. The sun managed to break through now and then to warm chilled bodies; though no day passed without its good six or eight hours of wetness. Clothes, despite slickers, were never dry. Blankets were soggy. Leather goods sprouted green fungus overnight; and worse, so did the loose cereals of the food supply. Maize, rice, beans, the staples of porter diet, ran to mold—which meant fermentation; which meant stomach ache; which meant more medicine.

Conversely to human misery, all nature rejoiced. Man pays for superiority over nature by having become a creature of artificial shelters. Without them he is wretched. Denied them for too long, he sickens. But nature blooms.

The burnt bush country that had been waiting for its first drop of moisture literally burst into exuberant green. Flowers leaped out of what had been

barren dust patches without a speck of leaf in sight. Even the mimosa thorn sprouted pink rosettes of bloom that scented the air—and the long thorns grew inches longer.

Birds of gaudy plumage appeared out of the long leagues of nowhere and sang their derision of the rain. Insects hatched in their myriads and nearly all of them seemed to require human food. But game was scarce. It kicked its heels all over many hundred miles of green plain and drank where it willed.

Meat therefore was infrequent. And corn was moldy. And through all that misery nearly two score of African males had to be pushed along, cajoled, coaxed, bullied, carefully herded like beasts of burden. There was potent reason why people did not travel in the rainy season; why Africa, beyond rail and auto road reach, sits down and stagnates, isolated, for six months in every year.

DOGGEDLY King pushed on. The direction was exactly eleven degrees west of North; and by compass bearing King held to it till his reward came in meeting with obstruction.

Native villages began to be vaguely helpless about finding fords. Food supplies were curiously unobtainable. There was no corn; there had been a famine; the elephants had trodden down the last season's crop; the villagers were starving themselves.

The restlessness of the porters was evidence that they were being slyly urged to desert. And desert some of them did.

King smiled thinly. This was the second phase of his quest that he had expected. It was proof that, while the common herd knew knothing about the dark mystery, they had been tipped off to impede the white man. A food strike in the wilderness is a weapon a hundred time more potent than in a civilized city. Africa was sullenly defending its secrets.

Against that stolid, unwavering defence many a white man's advance has helplessly wilted and come to an end; and that, incidentally, is one of the administration's strongest reasons for the employment of native police.

Barounggo stormed into the presence of local chieflings and flung down one of two choices.

"The *bwana m'kubwa*, my master, requires potio for his men. So and so many baskets of this and so many of that. If they be forthcoming swiftly, perhaps we condescend to pay. Otherwise we slay and take."

Of all peoples the African is perhaps more susceptible to lordly bluff than any other. And at that it was precarious guessing for those back country chiefs to determine whether the truculent great fellow were bluffing or not. It was a strong safari; the white man who ran it looked like a hard and determined individual; and the Masai was an awe-inspiring figure. Sulky orders were given, and women brought the required potio to the camp.

THE country began to change. The open thorn scrub with its tall sentinel acacia trees began to close in. Trees in clumps began to be frequent: tamarisks, silk cottons, copals. The safari was beginning to come into jungle country.

King mused upon a phenomenon of his own observation in Africa—that it was the people who lived in the jungles, rather than the open dwellers, who seemed to have evolved the more diabolic forms of dark and fantastic cults.

He was out hunting for meat when he met the first of these forest men. With the Hottentot carrying the extra gun and four pole bearers to carry in whatever he might shoot, he was skirting the jungle fringe, himself in advance, treading like a cat. A man blundered into view before he knew that strangers were near.

Seeing them, the man gave a howl, dropped his pack and bolted back into

the bush path. King called after him and set the Hottentot to shouting in the half dozen or so different languages that he knew. After a frightened silence the man hesitantly called back and presently was persuaded to emerge. A stalwart, quite intelligent looking man he was, and it turned out that he understood Swahili very creditably.

There were Boranna tribes in the jungle country, he said. He himself was journeying from his uncle's father's village—he pointed with his chin—two days' journey distant to his own village; he pushed out his lips in the other direction. His pack contained fish that he had netted in a jungle pool and mealie cakes that his uncle's father's second best wife had made as a gift to his own woman who was sister to—

King cut the man short. These African family affairs were always terrifically involved. He wanted to talk about other things. Yes, said the man, there was plenty of game in the jungle; he had passed bush bok only fifteen minutes back; but why worry about bush bok? If bwana were hungry, the man would gladly trade some of his fish and mealie cakes for a brass cartridge or whatever the white man would give him. In fact, he would trade all his fish and mealie cakes; for he could catch more fish and many women could make mealie cakes, while no woman could make a brass cartridge.

Altogether an obliging and ingenuous fellow; an unspoiled son of the wild. King asked him a few more questions about the beyond, of which the man knew nothing, traded in his mealie cakes for two empty shells and sent him grinning on his way.

Strictly enjoining his four men not to monkey with that pack and particularly not to become suddenly panicky and come clamoring on his heels, King with the Hottentot went into the dim jungle path to look for bush bok.

Bush bok were not so plentiful as the man had indicated; but natives always have the most fantastically inaccurate information about game, depending upon what they think the questioner wants to know rather than upon fact.

But meat was badly needed in the camp. Fish and mealie cakes were a delicacy; but after all, one native basket would not extend to any miracle of loaves and fishes for a whole safari. King crept quietly on, a long way farther than the fifteen minutes within which bush bok tracks should have been apparent.

The farther he went, the more perplexed became his expression. A couple of times he consulted his pocket compass. Finally he stopped. A phenomenon was here that required consideration before plunging ahead. It was through a cautious observation of things that did not just click that King was still alive. The Hottentot's cunning round eyes peered up at him.

"Does the pointing machine say what my feet have been thinking?" he asked, chuckling at what he knew would be a confirmation of his own observation.

"It says, little wise imp, that this path follows parallel with the jungle edge; and I'll bet you not fifty yards from it, just to keep out of the sun in hot weather."

"Aho? So that that man, who was not a fool, walking this path, would have known that we hunted along the fringe?"

King nodded, his eyes narrow with suspicion.

"And yet he pretended to be surprised—and I have seen no other path by which he might have come."

"Nor are there any bush bok. In such a path, bwana, there may well be a man trap, or men with spears hidden."

Why, King wondered, would a native pretend not to know that a white man was hunting parallel to his own path? Very cautiously, stepping on noiseless toes, King picked his way back along that suspicious path, pausing to listen, peering into every bush tangle.

It was with relief that he came into the open where the ingenuously obliging

jungle dweller had blundered into view.

Nothing had happened. No attack; not a suspicious sound. The sun had broken through a ragged hole in the clouds. Steam rose from the wet grass, warm and pleasant and cheerful.

"So-ss-ss!" The Hottentot, standing frozen on one leg, hissed the warning note of a puff adder and pointed.

The plantain leaf cover of the native pack had been removed. King might have known that four greedy native boys would plot to steal a little—just a taste—of the delicacy and then cover up their little depredation. And of course that was just what they had done. They lay now, all four of them, half hidden in the long grass, twisted into horrible contortions. Death had not come easily to them.

"Aa-ah!"

King's long exhalation of understanding was almost as sharp as the Hottentot's hiss. In three long strides he stood looking down at the four twisted bodies —and seeing nothing but the racing pictures of his own thoughts.

So this was the place. That uncanny boy with all his hokum of smelling out the trail had been right. Right to a compass degree. Somewhere in this jungle happened whatever it was that had happened to Sir Henry Ponsonby and had driven his orderly crazy. The blind search had passed through the baffling belt of blank ignorance, through the outer defence of passive obstruction, and now this was the third stage: active opposition unhampered by a single inhibition of civilization. Africa fighting with every weapon of its dark imagination to prevent the white man from finding out what the white man must not know.

"Somebody who backs this thing is very clever," muttered King. "It just happens by the grace of God that I hike and hunt better on an empty stomach."

"And what," the foresighted little Hottentot wanted to know in advance, "is to be told to the remaining porters who have not already deserted about these four who do not return?"

"Hmph! Tell them just this," said King. "They will now stick closer than bush ticks. In this jungle we find trouble in many forms."

"Truth," clucked the Hottentot. "The skin inside of my belly tells me that here live the father and mother of trouble."

YET both forebodings seemed to have been unnecessarily gloomy. King entered the jungle tense and alert against any treachery. With six *askaris* he took the lead. The porters, as many as were left of them, huddled behind. The Masai and the remaining *askaris* formed a rear guard, every man armed, watchful.

King knew the devilish ingenuity of man-traps, springy, bamboo things armed with hardwood spikes and set beside the trail, held by the most innocent looking liana vine triggers. Another kind might be set in the path, covered with leaves. Such a thing, sprung by a passerby, would rake the bowels from a man's belly, or a heavy knob would crash into his face. Another deadly trick was to tie venomous snakes beside the path. And what new devices there might be besides, nobody could guess.

Every forward step therefore was tested; every bush scrutinized. Progress was agonizingly slow. Nor was there any means of knowing which path might lead to the headquarters of the trouble or which might meander for miles to some unimportant hidden village.

"Presently," said King, "we shall hear the drums that tell of our advance; and we shall know at least the direction."

But there were no drums. Giant frogs boomed question and answer with deceptive regularity. A bittern kind of bird thrummed in a marsh with a volume worthy of a war drum. But no signals. Nor, as the party slowly progressed, were any man-traps encountered.

Of course, the obvious remedy for all this uncertainty was to waylay some jungle native, grab him and make him lead the advance. Even though he might refuse to betray the big juju village, he would know where the tribal man-traps would be located.

And it was just such a native that they caught—a tall fellow who came trotting along, singing lustily. Strangely enough, he exhibited no surprise at meeting a white man's safari creeping through the jungle. The surprise was rather on the part of the safari at the man's open-faced honesty.

Surely, he said. There was a big village barely a day's journey distant; and if the bwana were afraid of turning into the wrong path, he himself would be glad to lead the way for a small gift out of the bwana's generosity.

King remembered the cheerful ingenuousness of that other jungle dweller who had happened along with his mealie cakes and fish. Grimly he said:

"All right. Just three paces ahead all the time; no monkey tricks."

The man actually looked hurt. But the tempers of white men are always incomprehensible to natives. This man accepted the condition as the tantrum of just another queer white man and presently he was trotting ahead, chattering along over his shoulder in African good humor.

King thought to surprise something out of him.

"What do you know about the word, *n'gamma?*" he asked abruptly.

But the man displayed blank ignorance.

"Nay, bwana, I am but a cultivator of yams, and from them I make beer which I sell. I am no wise man who knows strange words. But in the big village is a *m'zungu monpéré*. He knows many strange tongues of many peoples. Without doubt he will enlighten bwana."

Well, that certainly seemed to knock the bottom out of a lot of things. A *monpéré* was a distortion of nothing less peaceful than *mon père*, handed down from the days of the early French missions. All missionaries, irrespective of race or creed, were *monpérés*.

A missionary was established at the big village. And it was there that King had been expecting to find the seat, the very home, of the black cult that was not afraid to lay hands upon white men. This thing was more baffling at the end of the trail than it had been at the beginning. Or was he off the trail altogether? King wondered. But then he remembered, not two hours' run behind, four men twisted into horrible shapes because they had stolen just a taste of mealie cakes and fish.

However, they all arrived at the mission station without mishap. The missionary was a Reverend Dr. Henderson, a Scotch Presbyterian. He was delighted to have a visitor and was, of course, the very soul of hospitality, as missionaries in the far outskirts of nowhere always are. He insisted that King should take up quarters in his own little bungalow. For King's servants he found room in his compound with his own black boys; and the safari he allocated among the huts of his converts, quite a little village among themselves.

"A dry hut and a few days of recuperation after this dreadful weather will set them all up," he said.

When all that was done and everybody comfortable he perked his lean face to one side.

"Let me see, er, Mister King," he inquired. "Is it possible that I have heard of you, Kingi Bwana? Er, might it be the same?"

King nodded.

"I hope the stories haven't been all bad."

The Reverend Henderson's wide blue eyes displayed almost alarm.

"Dear me, dear me. I sincerely hope—you know, Mr. King—er, you must forgive me. But it is said, as I suppose you must know, that where trouble is brewing, there Kingi Bwana is likely to show up. Nobody would travel during this season unless there were something

serious. I do hope that nothing is wrong anywhere near here. Everything has been going along so nicely."

KING postponed a discussion until the after-dinner prayers were concluded and the houseboys had distributed themselves among their huts within the wire fenced compound. Then over his pipe he told the missionary his story quite frankly, and concluded:

"I figured I was absolutely hot on the trail. But now I'm hanged if I know whether I'm not away off."

The Reverend Henderson was, of course, shocked at the recital.

"Oh, I hope so," he almost pleaded. "I hope you are wrong. In fact, I am sure you must be wrong. Nothing so dreadful could have happened here. Everything has been so quiet. And as for any juju cult—" He shook his head.

"But hang it all," King insisted, "I know I've been aiming right. There's been proof enough in the murderous interference. And it couldn't be much farther. That orderly of Ponsonby's could not in any circumstances have been running and hiding for more than a week; and it's just about a week's hard going from here in good weather to where I picked him up."

"Indeed? Good heavens, how horrible! They were here, of course. It was barely a month ago. As a matter of fact, Sir Henry was going to send me a runner from Lenia to return some books. But—er, well, somehow he failed to do so."

"Aa-ah! He was at Fort Harrington and he was here—and he disappeared. Hmm! Well, leaving aside my theory about a juju—which I don't yet give up—what about slave raiding?"

"My dear Mr. King—" Dr. Henderson spread out his thin hands deprecatingly—"you know very well that most of this slave raiding is propaganda put out by certain European powers that want to embarrass Abyssinia in order to gain trade concessions. We are just a few miles south of the border here, and if there were any such horrible traffic—"

"So? Just below the border, eh?"

"Yes, Bagawaiyo, this village, is on the old caravan route; and established in British Territory, I have no doubt, for security's sake."

"Aa-ah! An old caravan route? Right handy for running off a few men now and then."

"My dear Mr. King! I should have heard some rumors. Men, of course, disappear. Some fall victims to the jungle; some just go away in the haphazard African manner; and in the borderland district the percentage is always high. But I have been here two years now and I have heard nothing that might lead to suspicion of anything so dreadful as slave traffic. Nor did my predecessor leave any such notes. Oh, let me assure you that nothing that might call for official intervention has been going on here."

King remained silently noncommittal. He liked missionaries on the whole. Skeptically tolerant, he felt that their Christian endeavors at least did no harm and he strongly agreed with their civilizing influence—though that did not mean that he agreed always with the soundness of their individual judgment. And then again, regrettably, there had been, in the history of Africa, renegade preachers who actually made use of their influence and their cloth to cover relationship with the most objectionable kind of back country traders.

King reserved his comment. The Reverend Henderson went on:

"Let me tell you what we shall do. I shall send a note over tomorrow morning to the Reverend Leroy. He knows these people much better than you or I could ever hope to."

"And the Reverend Leroy is—"

"A colored brother. From Jamaica, I believe, or Barbados. I can not altogether agree with some of his dogma, and he can not agree with some of my theories of approach to the native. An educated black man, you know, is al-

ways apt to feel a little superior. But he felt the call to minister to his own race and he is doing splendid work. Naturally he is closer to the undercurrents of native doings than any white man can be."

THE Reverend Leroy proved to be a splendid specimen of light negro, broad shouldered and robust, with a keenly intelligent face. He was meticulously dressed in proper clerical garb and he spoke educated English with a vaguely elusive accent.

He smiled broadly at the idea of juju.

"Not among these Boranna tribes. These people are two-thirds Galla blood. The Galla are fighting men, almost as ferocious as that Masai of yours. They are animists. There is some minor witch doctory among them in outlying districts; though none here.

"At worst, their function is rather the interpretation of the forces of nature, predictions of rainfall, birth auguries, luck charms; a mild form of sorcery that no sensible man can object to in Africa where so many more important evils have to be combated. Juju, on the other hand, is the most debased form of idolatry. Anybody who has made a study of Africa knows that the more virile fighting people, the Zulu, the Masai, the Galla, never went in for that sort of thing."

King grasped at once what Dr. Henderson had gently hinted at. Leroy was distinctly superior; didactic, one might even say. King had to admit that he ought to have thought of all those quite patent facts himself. It was true. Juju belonged among the debased Central and West Coast peoples. The men here were an upstanding, open faced folk. He laughed and said to the Reverend Leroy:

"Well, I figured I was hot on the trail. But you know your own people."

"Not my people, Mr. King." The preacher's voice was bitter. "I do not know my own people. My parents were taken away from wherever they belonged—as slaves—by white men. I have no people."

King felt suddenly quite queerly shocked. He had known slaves; he had seen plenty of them in his own day. Savages they had been, dull creatures of no understanding, quite possibly better off in their condition than at large, exposed to the diseases and dangers of their native state. Right in his own country he had known colored men whose parents had been slaves. Humble people they were, far from the country of their origin.

That had seemed different somehow. But to meet an educated man, a man of understanding, in Africa, at home so to speak, who did not know where was his home! That was shocking. King could understand the resentment that such a man could feel against the system that had caused his condition. The preacher was talking again.

"And now his Majesty's government is all in a pother because politicians in Parliament point indignant fingers at black Abyssinia about slave raiding. Let his Majesty's government turn its eyes closer to home to look for slaves, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, for instance. You know as well as I do, Mr. King, that slave raiding today is punishable in Abyssinia by the death penalty. It is possible, despite that law, that some bold petty chief may dash across the border now and then and kidnap a prospective servant or so. And as a matter of fact that possibility must account for some of the occasional disappearances that do occur. But slave raiding on any organized scale? I assure you, Mr. King, there is no such thing in this district."

King could not help but be convinced. Yet doggedly he asked the question:

"So men do disappear, eh? And if not slaves, what did Sir Henry Ponsonby find out before he, too, disappeared?"

That question remained a dark mystery. If Leroy could throw no light

on it, then it was indeed one of the hidden things of Africa that would be likely to remain hidden forever. King was impressed by the intelligence and force of the man. The Reverend Henderson, good soul, was the acme of hospitality and helpful solicitude; but he was the type of man of God who would never be able to see his flock other than as errant children. Leroy, however, knew what he was talking about.

The Masai, leaning on his spear, stood scowling after his departing figure.

"A proper man," he growled. "A whole figure of a man. What need has he to be ashamed and hide beneath a copy of white man's clothing?"

The Hottentot impishly strutted in imitation, copying the play of the big hands, the swing of the clerical coat, choking in paroxysms over an imaginary collar.

"Be silent!" ordered King. "And cut that out, ape's offspring. He is a holy man."

"*Wagh!*" growled the Masai. "I would like to fight that one."

Both men curiously resented the black man's conversion to white man's ways and clothing. Perhaps it was that both sensed the attitude of superiority. King, smiling skeptically, wondered, if that were the general native reaction, what might be the pros and cons of the never ending debate in religious circles in Africa about sending native missionaries to their own people.

But that was an idle and transient cogitation. The dominating thought in King's mind was that here or hereabouts Ponsonby was last seen and from here or hereabouts his orderly had escaped as a shrieking lunatic. Yet two missionaries who lived and worked here both gave the district a clean bill of health. That made a dead end to the whole trail.

King felt as completely defeated as a chess player when checkmated. Yet the muscles of his jaws bunched as he prowled a long beat up and down the compound. He refused to condemn utterly his own judgment; he had been too careful; he had thrown all his knowledge of Africa into this blind game of chess where dead men marked the dark squares as proof of correct play. Now the whole board seemed to have been snatched from before him. Not very hopefully he turned to the Hottentot who crouched on a tree stump like a gnome on a toadstool.

"What wisdom of the lower pit have you to offer, impling?"

"This," said the grotesque one with certitude, "is an emptiness where one must buy wisdom from a great witch doctor."

"Bah! The *monpéré* says there is no witch doctor here."

The goblin gave vent to a sepulchral croak of negation.

"The *monpéré* is a man who has two hearts and three open hands with which to give; but knowledge is not among his gifts. Buy wisdom rather of that great black one who has become a white witch-doctor. It is written in his face that he has much—if he will sell to a white man."

"Hah!"

King was startled at the accuracy of the little man's observation. What he implied was true. The Reverend Leroy's attitude was distinctly mistrustful of white men.

King was just a semi-official white man to him. For all that he knew, this white investigator was the usual kind: loftily misunderstanding the black man's crudely torturous viewpoint, didactically positive of the white man's law, a forerunner possibly of soldiers and machine guns. Perhaps the Leroy did know something. But if, as a black man, he had made up his mind that silence meant protection for black men, no argument that King knew would persuade him to speak.

No, the next move in the game must be King's, to find somehow another dark square on the board where something or other—another dead man perhaps—would be a clue.

THAT night the rain roared on the thatch roof with the muffled thunder of drums. King sought for circumstantial arguments to break down the Reverend Henderson's bland assurance of prevailing peace and innocence. All that King could produce were a hypnotized boy and some dead men by the way; against which the Reverend Henderson quoted two years of tranquil residence among a superior class of natives with a growing colony of converts.

Then King heard it—soft and sublimated through the rain, barely distinguishable. But King had been listening for just that sound for a long time. He sat up tense, his eyes blazing.

Thump-thump—thump-a-thump—a-thump-thump-a-thump!

"It is a dance somewhere," was the missionary's ready explanation. "These foolish boys will dance all night for the most absurd reasons, and in the morning they are totally unfitted to work on their cultivated clearings."

"What hut is there big enough to stage a dance in this rain?" King, skeptical, wanted to know.

The missionary was nonplused. The thought had not occurred to him. Kaffa the Hottentot knocked on the door with the silver ring that he wore on his big toe. Entering, his round eyes glittered with excitement. Words bubbled from his mouth.

"It is the same talk, bwana, that we heard before that no man of us could read."

"Hellfire!" King muttered. "I'll bet I can read it now. I'll bet it's a gathering signal. Excuse me, Padre, for cussing, but this is big news. That's signaling the gang for a night pow-wow because we're here. And, come to think of it, that same signal when we heard it before was calling the scattered search parties together after we'd picked up their man. By golly, this *is* headquarters. I knew it. I knew darn well we hadn't gone astray. And me, I'm going right out and find where the gang meets."

The missionary was flustered and fearful.

"But, Mr. King, that is impossible. Nothing like that could be going on here. And if it were, remember, I beg you, 'He that meddleth with strife belonging not to him is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.'"

"This belongs to me all right," said King grimly. "It's my *shauri* that I came up here to meddle into."

"But to plunge into a secret native gathering—and at night—would be extremely dangerous. My dear Mr. King, I counsel and implore you to wait till the morning."

King was impatient to the point of discourtesy.

"Aw, shucks! Don't be silly. I mean—I beg pardon—have some sense. What would I ever find in the morning? Your peaceful native village, as ox-dumb and quiet as you've always known it."

"Barounggo is ready," said the Hottentot. "He waits."

"Good," said King. "Let's go!"

The rain made a blurred patch of the shaft of light from the mission bungalow door—just sufficient to designate in dim outline the gateway through the wire fence. In a moment the three were out of it and in pitch blackness. King carried only his flashlight; a lantern would have been a stupid advertisement of their presence. The other hand held his Luger pistol, the safety catch thrown back.

He had no illusions about what he might be going into. His first meeting with the people who drummed that way had shown that they were fighters, and their warnings along the way were stark evidence that they were killers—to say nothing as yet of Ponsonby who had disappeared or of his orderly who had been driven mad.

"What weapon have you, Kaffa?" he asked. As for the Masai, King knew that he stirred nowhere without his great spear and that he scorned all other

weapons; the voice of the Hottentot panted excitedly from the darkness behind him:

"I have in my waistband the short sword that I took from the Somali dog last year and in my left hand a knife and in my right hand bwana's second gun that shoots six times out of the box that turns."

"Hmh! Sounds almost like you're armed. Now what direction are those cursed drums coming from?"

Fitfully the throb and plunk of the drums eddied about on the gusty wind. Big voice and little voice, talking their message now from dead ahead, now from away to one side. Guided half by guesswork, King found a path and crept along it stealthily, flashing his light for the briefest fraction of a second at a time.

Once the ray fell upon a crouching something that snorted and crashed away in the undergrowth. A hyena howled fiendishly out of the blackness. Intersecting paths confused the way. All around the village, of course, was a maze of paths. King swore in perplexity.

The driving rain drowned out the drum signals for minutes at a time. When King was just about ready to concede that perhaps the signals were finished, the message transmitted, the elusive *thump-a-thump!* would drift in —but from where? King's ears were trained. But he could not place those drums.

By trial and error the three progressed, following a path till they were sure that the sound bore more to one side.

Not a native was encountered. Either the whole community had hurried to the rendezvous, or those who perhaps did not belong among the initiates knew enough to stay very properly in their huts when the juju drums talked. Even had King been able to catch a native or two, he knew that there would be no hope at all of getting the men to admit that they could hear the dread drums.

SLOWLY the three floundered along, King in the lead with his momentary spark of light. He was not afraid of man-traps. So close to the village they would be a danger to any blundering native. Besides, he was sure the signalers had relied upon the heavy shower to cover their cautious messages.

All of a sudden a veering gust of wind carried the sound unmistakably from ahead, convincingly loud. Momentarily the rain ceased. King tingled with expectations of he knew not what; but he was on the right path to find out. He pushed on, as silently as a cat, by feeling the bushes on either side, the flashlight switched off.

His boot bumped into something soft that lay across the trail. It heaved up under his foot. King sprawled over it; but, falling, clutched at it. In a moment he found himself tangled with a muscular naked body that writhed under him.

"Awo! What happens?" came the Hottentot's whisper; and on the instant he flung himself into the tangle.

The Masai's great hands came diving down out of the dark and clutched at whatever he could find.

Now three men, it would seem, ought to have been well able to capture one, however muscular. But the darkness impeded them, and the muscular body for which they fought had been carefully oiled from head to foot. Inevitably the man wriggled free. He emitted a shrill whistle, and there followed the quick pad of feet running down the path. After that nothing.

Nothing at all. No further sound of human origin. The drums ceased abruptly; that was all. The wind shook the branches high above, and heavy drops plopped with leathery concussions upon soggy, dead leaves. Soaked to the bone, the three men shivered. Somewhere a jackal moaned its long preliminary note and its fellows took up the hellish chorus of low howls rising crescendo to high pitched shrieks. King

knew that they sat in a circle round some garbage heap in the very center of a huddle of huts with their noses pointed skyward while they screamed under whatever fell impulse it is that causes jackals to congregate and scream.

"Ai thuah!" The Hottentot shivered. "Sickness will come of this night."

King pressed his flashlight button on and turned it upon himself and his two men. There were no hurts. The muscular oiled man in the path had carried no knife. Just a watcher, lying craftily low like a snake across the trail.

King shrugged. There was nothing else he could do.

"Somebody," he repeated his conviction, "somebody who is back of this thing is very damned clever indeed.

IN THE morning King was grimly suspicious of everything and everybody in this hidden jungle village that was given such a clean bill of health by no less than two resident missionaries. He was determined to try to retrace his wanderings of the night. Somewhere at the end of the path, if he could pick it out from its crisscrossed intersections, was something; or at all events there had been something doing last night; something secret enough to occasion the posting of a watcher on the path.

Quietly he told the Masai to post unobtrusive guards to see that nobody left the mission, and he ordered the Hottentot to keep eyes and ears open for whispers and rumors. He suspected even this missionary. But, surprisingly, the missionary was eager to accompany him on his quest.

"If there is any underground wickedness going on, Mr. King—and your extraordinary experience of last night almost convinces me—it is my duty to find out about it and put a stop to it before it grows to something that will perhaps need police interference."

King smiled thinly.

"So you don't approve of a police investigation coming here, eh?"

The missionary flushed.

"Oh, don't mistake me, Mr. King; don't misunderstand me. There are some splendid and honorable men among the police; but some natives elevated to power, Mr. King— Surely you recall the text:

> "For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it can not bear; for a servant when he reigneth; and for a fool when he is filled with meat."

and I am afraid, I am very much afraid, that native constabulary fall all too often into both categories."

"Hmh! It seems that we agree on some things at least," said King shortly. "But how about the danger of butting into secret native ceremonies?"

"Am I not my brother's keeper, Mr. King?" was all that the missionary replied. "Come, let us go. I shall take my Jezebel for a run, if you don't mind."

King raised his eyebrows.

"My watchdog," said the missionary, and was immediately embarrassed at having to explain. "A female, Mr. King; and quite, ah—indiscriminate." It was probable the solitary wavering attempt at humor in that earnest man's life.

The rain had for the time being ceased. As King picked out the previous night's path by no more than memory of turnings he watched the shivering "dew-boy" like a hawk for the least indication of lagging or unwillingness. The dew-boy in Africa is a wretched youth whose function it is to go ahead and shake down upon his own naked shoulders the accumulated moisture from overhanging branches and bushes that crowd the narrow pathways. But the boy trotted ahead wherever directed without hesitation. The Reverend Henderson's faith in the peacefulness of his bailiwick was renewed.

"You will find no juju house or devil-doctor along here, Mr. King. This road leads past brother Leroy's little settlement and on to some old rock carvings, and there it comes to an end."

King was immediately keen.

"Rock carvings, eh? Crude sculpture and native cults often go hand in hand. By all means let us examine these rock carvings."

Reverend Henderson laughed.

"You are too suspicious. You won't be able to attach any blame to my people here on account of those carvings. They are many hundreds of years too ancient for that."

The trail, as King picked it out, passed along a low embankment on one side of which, rudely fenced by the haphazard intertwining of a skimpy bush fringe, was a wide, ready lake. King stopped, wondering whether he were on the right path; whether, if they had passed so close, the Hottentot with his extraordinarily acute senses would not have smelled the water. But he reflected that the heavy rain of the night might well have drowned out the dank odor of the lake.

But another matter was causing King to stare frowningly and to whistle a tuneless air through his teeth. Gray-green, moss-grown, log-like things floated in the lake—swarms of them. The dog, Jezebel, bristled and growled at them; then barked in a frenzy of hate. Some of the nearer logs rose just the merest trifle higher and swung end-on; almost imperceptible ripples showed that they moved forward. The dog quickly tucked her tail between her legs and fled yelping.

Crocodile worship was the idea that was revolving in King's head. His mind seized upon and analyzed the pros and cons. He could conceive of horrific things connected with crocodiles and African imaginativeness. Orgies fearful enough perhaps to unseat a man's mind. Yet juju rites, as he knew them, invariably centered around some individual fetish, some enormous patriarch crocodile perhaps, but not a lakeful of them.

"Still," he muttered the practical question to himself, "what do they eat?"

"Fish," said the Reverend Henderson readily. "They have left no fish in this lake. The natives travel a long distance to another pool to catch fish. Possibly, too, they are cannibalistic and devour each other."

"Crocodiles aren't cannibalistic," King grunted his observation of nature lore. But "cannibals" was another thought that flashed into his mind; though he was ready to reject it almost before the Reverend Henderson, shocked, said:

"My dear Mr. King, you have seen the people, a fine upstanding lot. They are not the type."

"And yet—" King doggedly groped for a connecting clew—"Ponsonby disappeared and his orderly went screaming crazy."

His eyes were focused upon a little low-lying island that loomed ghostly through the drifting mists that steamed from the scummy water's surface. Miasmatic islands and gruesome fetish cults were another combination that linked darkly together.

The Reverend Henderson read his thoughts.

"The place is little more than a morass," he argued. "Or at least so it looks to be; and the low scrub on it is not high enough to conceal even a shack, much less any sort of juju house. Furthermore, there is no means of getting to it through this infested water; there is not a canoe in the place, as you can easily assure yourself."

King was half convinced, barely half. A reptile-infested lake and a reedy island offered nightmare possibilities to the devil-ridden African mind. Decidedly the lake must be investigated further. Grudgingly he conceded:

"You sure give the place a clear alibi. But answer this: Hut groups, you say, are all around in the bush. This is a well trodden path, well used. Why have we met nobody in pretty near two miles of it? It doesn't smell natural to me. But I'll bet you we'll find something not so healthy at the end of it. Let's get along and take a look at those rock carvings."

The missionary was complacent.

"I doubt it, Mr. King. Indeed, I venture to doubt it. I have been here for two years and my predecessor for five, and we have not found the soil unfruitful to our labors."

King grunted. To him the argument was not so convincing as the more practical one of lack of canoes and sheer excess of commonplace reptiles upon which to focus a cult. Yet a shock was coming to disturb the missionary's equanimity.

The dog, Jezebel, was running ahead in the path, nosing and scuffling in the underbrush. She turned a corner and pattered on. There sounded a whirring twang, an agonized yelp, and the body of the dog hurtled back into view as if it might have been one of those gruesome living projectiles that used to be fired from Roman catapults.

THE dew-boy uttered a strangled shriek and shrank back into the bushes, his eyes goggling with horror at the thought of what might have happened to him. King leaped to the corner, his pistol drawn. No human being was in sight; but standing at the edge of the path, still gently quivering, was a springy bamboo, to the head of which, at waist height, was lashed a chevaux-de-frise of sharp hardwood spikes. Had a man pushed against the innocent looking tendril of vine that now hung from the adjacent bush, the instrument would have smashed full into his unprotected stomach.

King stared at it, and his mouth pinched down to a grim line. He nodded, acknowledging to himself the answer to the question he had but a few moments ago fired at the missionary.

"So that's why we met nobody on this path. Tipped off. Every man, woman and child in the village—except maybe the Reverend's converts; else that dew-boy would have known. And every African one of them kept the secret— The path I went over last night. And they knew damn well I'd trace it today. Clever. Hellishly clever."

King went back to the Reverend Henderson, whom he found gulping dry-eyed over the body of the mangled dog, incredulity and horror in this thin, ascetic face. Any vague part that the unhappy missionary might have had in King's all-embracing suspicion was dissipated at sight of his genuine grief and amazement. All that King found within himself to say rather gruffly was—

"Well, I guess this has been something of a revelation that big juju is afoot somewhere."

The Reverend Henderson rose from his knees. He was trembling.

"Revelation indeed, Mr. King. 'The sorcerers and idolaters shall have their part in the lake.' But what does it mean? What is this abomination of desolation of which I have known nothing in all my two years?"

King's voice was grim.

"It means just Africa, Padre. Things that white men—and maybe some black men—mustn't know. So my advice to you is to go right back to your mission.

King knew that he was at close grips at last with the sinister power, whatever it might be, that had eliminated Sir Henry Ponsonby for coming too close to its secret. He knew that all around him were savages who knew about that power—some of them without doubt a part of it, ready to carry out its ruthless commands as soon as it should judge its time to be ripe. But beyond that he knew nothing. He was up against one of the dark things of Africa. It behooved him to go very carefully. He did not want to be hampered in retreat by a frail and not very practical missionary.

But the Reverend Henderson was suddenly determined.

"Not alone, Mr. King, not alone. If this means some horrible form of witch-doctory I must find out about it and crush it before the police—before a worse thing shall befall. I can not hold with Brother Leroy's tolerance of what he calls the milder forms of sorcery. I'm

coming with you. And, as a matter of fact, we shall pick up Brother Leroy on the way and convince him about the seriousness of this evil."

King shrugged. He had had experience of the obstinacy of these righteous men when they felt that duty called. He had no time to waste in argument just then. The dew-boy, after his narrow escape, was quite useless. He chattered and his knees trembled. King pushed him to the rear and himself led the way, cautious, alert in a strange territory. But there was no other man-trap. Shrewdly enough, the setter of the one reasoned that if the first should fail every succeeding step would be so carefully inspected as to render others useless.

A pattering of feet sounded behind them. King tensed, prepared for anything on that path. Then he relaxed.

"It is only one man," he said. In a few seconds the little Hottentot appeared. He carried King's rifle and ammunition pouch.

"Bwana," he panted, "the order to stay behind must be forgiven. For it was thus: Barounggo and I held conference, and Barounggo said, 'I smell blood in this place. Death walks upon crafty feet. Go thou, therefore, to the bwana and carry his gun. I stay and keep guard and I utilize the time in exercising these worthless *askaris* in the use of shield and spear.' So, bwana, I came, and if it was an offence I await rebuke."

"Huh!" King grunted. "Barounggo is always smelling blood." But a smile cracked his hard face. "It was no offence, apeling. But wit is needed here rather than shield and spear. Be watchful and absolve no man from suspicion."

BROTHER LEROY'S settlement was not so extensive as that of his confrère. Evidently his converts were not so numerous. The mission house was a neat little square building of adobe and thatch, thickly whitewashed. Straggling about it were a collection of round huts; and a short distance away a very large circular one surmounted by a cross, the three points of which were rounded off with gleaming ostrich shells.

"His chapel," whispered the Reverend Henderson, "though I deplore any pandering to native superstition in permitting their ideas of decoration. I can not help feeling they are grafting on to Christian teaching some pagan significance of which we are not aware, a practice which, alas, we have to combat in all conversion."

The Reverend Leroy was standing at his door. He came forward to meet them, and at the Reverend Henderson's serious face he laughed with a superior condescension. There was a certain derision in his tone.

"I know he is telling you about my ostrich eggs, Mr. King, no? Though I have assured my white colleague that in black Abyssinia—which was officially Christianized by the Alexandrine Monk Frumentius while my good friend's own naked forebears were still slinging stones at the Roman wall across North Britain—he will find all crosses decorated with ostrich eggs. But—" he became serious—"I hear that you ran into some secret ceremonial or other last night."

King's eyes narrowed.

"How do you know?" he asked bluntly.

"One of my little flock had some story about it. He did not know what it was all about. Local magicians, you know, don't let our converts into their doings. But it is noised abroad that you stumbled over a watcher."

"Yeah? Why was there a watcher? That's what I want to know," said King.

The Reverend Leroy shrugged.

"Obviously to keep the uninitiated away. Or—"his smile was malicious—"Kingi Bwana is known in Africa for prying into the more secret little native doings."

To which King grunted:

"Huh! Well it was a darn sight more than little doings, and I'm going to find

the juju house where all this hellery centers."

"Oh, you won't find any juju house around here." The Reverend Leroy was positive. "There's not a hut in the whole district big enough to house any secret gathering, excepting—" he laughed "my colleague's chapel and mine."

Again there seemed to be a blank wall of impossibility against which King knocked helplessly. Juju ceremonies, as he knew them, were inconceivable without some central home of horrors, some dark, skull-festooned temple of gruesome superstition. The only thin hope of a clew to the enigma that was left to him seemed to be the rock carvings.

The Reverend Leroy flouted the idea of danger lurking beside the path; and to prove his faith he insisted upon leading the way himself. He swung along with great, careless strides, and as he went he lectured learnedly on ancient sculpture in Africa.

Without mishap they came to a low bluff of outcropping granite upon the face of which crude figures had been chiseled in outline, like the inexpert drawings of a child upon a blackboard. Some were so worn as to be indistinguishable, some almost intact. Monstrous distortions of gods or devils they seemed to be, depicting the baser human attributes. Some were appallingly obscene. All conveyed the impression, so startlingly common to primitive religious statuary, of dreadful thought in their inception.

One in a surprisingly good state of preservation particularly attracted King's interest. It depicted an enormous serpent that seemed to be engulfing a whole line of human victims in a row. With stark realism a series of bloated swellings showed the passage of the bodies down the creature's gullet.

Another group pictured some sort of ceremonial. The monster seemed to be dead. A priest of some sort, decked in trappings of bones, performed an invocation while naked men beat their heads upon the ground in grief and veneration. Out of the dead body, phoenix-like, a crude outline of its spirit rose and towered above the worshipers.

King stared at the things, fascinated. The Reverend Henderson, though he had seen them before, shuddered.

"A singularly fearsome conception, even for Africa, is it not?"

King continued to stare in frowning silence. Then—

"So fearsome," he murmured, more to himself than to anybody in particular, "that if a man were to see such a thing in real life, I could well imagine him going shrieking crazy . . ."

THE Reverend Henderson stared at him round eyed, incredulous that so fantastic a horror could have any basis in truth. The Reverend Leroy had the greater callousness of his heredity. He dismissed the gruesome possibility with a large wave of his hand and discoursed expansively upon ancient serpent worship, showing a wide knowledge of the subject, tracing the venerable cult through earliest Europe and back to Africa in Egyptian sculpture.

But King was not listening to him. He was poking at some mud-spattered, fluffy substance with the toe of his boot. When the dirt and rubble was kicked away it turned out to be a little heap of feathers—chicken feathers that had once been white.

"Hmh!" King surveyed them blackly. "Looks like somebody don't think those pictures are too ancient to appreciate a little attention."

The Reverend Leroy's assurance was jolted. He stared at the feathers, his eyeballs white in his dark face. Then he found an explanation.

"Some superstitious savage, I suppose, making a luck sacrifice to the ancient gods. I must confess I did not know that any such practice existed here."

King was suddenly overcome by the feeling that this deserted scene of an ancient cult was dangerous ground; that

eyes watched from the jungle. His skin tingled with a sense of impending hostility and with it of imminent discovery of something profoundly important.

Then he got it. The Hottentot's dry coughing attracted his attention. The little man's eyes caught his and rolled furtively in the direction of the Reverend Leroy. King's carefully casual scrutiny could making nothing of it at first, till, looking back at the Hottentot, he saw the cunning little face move almost imperceptibly sidewise. Carelessly he stepped aside himself; and then he saw what had been screened from his view by the great bulk of the black missionary—a symbol cut into the rock: two leopard spots and a wavy line that bifurcated at the lower end.

King's pulse pounded suddenly. But he forced himself to concentrate his interest upon the sculpture of the monstrous snake. He made vacuous talk while his mind raced.

"A fearful thing, as you say, Dr. Henderson. Fascinatingly so. A thing to which I must certainly devote more study."

"Yes, indeed." The Reverend Henderson shuddered. "Sir Henry Ponsonby, too, was very much interested in it."

"Aa-ah!"

This time there was no disguising King's emotion. All of a sudden, like lightning breaking through a black thunder cloud, a gleam of understanding lighted his eyes, and then his expression closed down on it, scowlingly introspective. Suddenly he said:

"Let's go home. This is quite the most horrible thing that I have come across in Africa."

On the way home he sent the Hottentot in front with his pistol, the Reverend Henderson in the center, himself bringing up the rear. He was more alert and watchful even than when he came, suspicious of more man-traps.

The only observation that King made as he went on his scowling way was:

"I had hoped to find Ponsonby somewhere, but—"

The Reverend Henderson gaped at him wide-eyed as he panted alongside.

"But what?" he whispered the nervous question.

"I don't know," said King shortly. A thought struck him and he gave the Hottentot some instructions. The little man's face contorted with wise understanding as he turned back on the path.

THE Reverend Henderson slumped in his stiff, handmade chair, amazement, incredulity and utter dejection in his expression. His world was crumbling about his feet. A delegation of his flock, headed by his chief convert, a presbyter of his church, had come to him and had urged him to flee from that place.

They were afraid, they said. They had been warned, furtively and in quick whispers, by relatives who did not belong in the flock that the devil-devil of the place was angry with them.

When their minister, gravely reproving, had reminded them that their Father in heaven was all powerful to protect them from the power of the devil, they had replied with African literalness that, yes, they believed that, because their good teacher had so taught them; but heaven was far away and the devil-devil was here in their midst.

That was the first shock to their pastor. But they went on to worse. This was not the pastor's devil in far away hell who was at constant warfare with the Father in far away heaven—about men's souls in the future and that vaguely understood thing called sin—but a very imminent devil-devil who snatched up men's bodies right here and now and caused them utterly to disappear.

This was awful. It was nothing short of idolatry. What did they mean? Their pastor stormed at them. What stupid superstition was this about witch-doctory or—he turned miserable eyes to King and he used the hated word—juju?

Not witch-doctory, said the delegation; nor juju. When juju killed a man the remains were always fearsomely displayed as a mark of juju's power. The body was found, or the horribly torn skin was draped over somebody's thorn fence, or at least the skull grinned from a pole in some fetish grove. But this devil-devil devoured men, hair, bones and hide; there was never a trace. Nobody knew who might be gobbled up next; the strongest men and the bravest warriors disappeared as silently as any. The drums talked; the men went; that was all.

The missionary was appalled. Not so much at the bizarre superstitions as at the revelation that such superstitions continued to exist among his Christianized flock.

"But why—" he wailed—"why am I hearing this now?" Why in all my two years of ministry here have I never heard anything about these pagan beliefs?"

At that the converts' expressions became wooden, and they remained dumb.

King gave the answer.

"Because, my dear Padre, you have never until now butted into the secret doings of Africa. You have been content to gain your converts and to lead them according to your lights; and the dark outside has left you alone. But now, as your Book so aptly says, you have meddled with strife that doesn't belong to you and you are in the position of one who has taken a dog by the ears."

Curtly he demanded confirmation of the chief convert. The man had talked with King's safari men. He knew that this bwana was not one to be put off with evasions. Yes, he admitted, hitherto the devil-devil had confined its attentions to the unconverted herd; but the converts, feeling secure under the white preacher's protection, had been content. But now they had been warned by frightened relatives that the devil beast was about to turn its anger upon them. So therefore they came to their pastor and wanted him to pack up and flee from the place.

And they meant exactly that. To up and go, no matter where, to any far place out of this particular demon's range. To an African, of course, it is nothing to pack his few pots and other belongings into a bundle and leave his mud hut that he could rebuild somewhere else with no expenditure except a little labor. That was what the whole panic stricken colony was ready to do.

"Yeah," said King through set teeth, "that's how secret Africa works. Frighten off your men with ghost stories, and the white man has got to up and go with them or be left stranded. That one is the oldest and the easiest of tricks to pull off and the hardest for the white man to combat. I tell you, Padre, my whole safari would be bolting, gibbering through the jungle right now, except that my Masai stands over them with his spear and threatens to pin the first man to the ground like a beetle."

He tried to extract some particulars of the devil-devil from the converts; but quite quickly he was convinced that they knew nothing. They themselves, of course, were not initiated into the mystery; nor were most of the other people. Only a few men and some women of the village were let in on this thing; and nobody knew exactly who they were. The devil thing existed and devoured some dozen people every month—at that a long whistle escaped from King—but that was about the sum total of the common knowledge.

"Well," King told them grimly, "I, personally, am going to kill this devil-devil. So get out and tell your friends that." He turned to comfort the Reverend Henderson, who was now a wilted and piteous figure of dejection.

"Why?" he kept moaning to himself. "Why have I not known? In all my years of labor among my people I have not learned to know their hearts. I have been filled with pride of mere numbers. I thought I was leading them

out of their blindness to the light without ever realizing my own blindness. 'They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept'."

Deliberately King began to jolt him out of that self-reproachful introspection.

"Of course, I'm the Jonah who has brought all this on to you; so I'll just take my crowd and get out. I'll camp—by golly, I'll camp bang in the middle of the village square and call on this secret society to do its stuff in public."

The Reverend Henderson was properly shaken out of his mood.

"Oh, by no means, Mr. King," he hastened to insist. "Such a thing is not to be thought of. In any case they—it—whatever this diabolical business is—have marked me down for destruction because they feel sure that I now know as much about their foul secrets as you do. And they know—as you know, Mr. King—that I inevitably abhor their every thought and deed and that I am bound to fight them with you."

KING'S black frown twisted to a wry smile at the stoutness of the frail missionary's spirit.

"I wish I could think you understood exactly how tough a proposition this is, Padre. What your boys just said bears out what you yourself have maintained all along—that these people of fighting Galla stock are as a general type above the grosser forms of African cults. Only a few, the more debased individuals, are initiates in the devilish thing. Further—" he pointed a sudden finger at the missionary—"it bears out what I've been telling you about those sculptures and their meaning. This devil-devil thing devours without a trace—hide, hair and bones, *like a snake devours.* It all fits exactly."

The Reverend Henderson, pale, almost gasping, fought away the incredible horror with nervous hands.

"But such a thing is impossible, Mr. King. It is insane. Those sculptures are hundreds of years old. Nothing could live that long."

King shook his head.

"Some of them are old. The place is undoubtedly old—a good place to graft a new cult on to. But the rubble that I kicked up over those chicken feathers wasn't old; not weather-worn; the chips were sharp edged."

The missionary stared at him, trying to digest the implication.

"That symbol," said King. "Two spots and a wavy line cut into the rock; the same thing smeared with paint on the crazed orderly's chest. Not leopard spots; but the two eyes and the forked tongue of a snake."

The missionary stared in horrified silence.

"A clever man," King went on with awful conviction, "could easily chip out those snake pictures. He could scarify them; he could rub down the edges to make them look old. He could tell his fanatical gang any miracle story of how they got there. And the man who heads this thing is very clever indeed."

Against his conviction the missionary's mind rejected the hideous thought.

"I can not believe it, Mr. King. I will not believe that any human being can be so close to the devil as to feed human victims to a—" A tremor of shuddering choked his voice.

"In Africa," said King, "the devil is sometimes very close to the surface."

"But—" the missionary still refused to accept so awful a possibility—"but such a thing would be physically impossible. No snake, however monstrous, could—" He was unable to put the thought into words.

"I don't know," mused King. "I'm guessing in the dark. But I know this. I have seen in Nairobi an East Indian snake charmer feed six large rats, one right after the other, into a four-foot python no thicker than my wrist—and you could see the bulge of each one of them in its gullet just like in the stone picture. So a big snake perhaps—maybe

a thirty-foot python—"

A choked sound came from the Reverend Henderson's throat.

"Merciful God forfend! Stop, Mr. King. For pity's sake, stop. I can stand no more. I can not; I will not believe such diabolism. But even if—" a ghostly ray of hope came into his ashen face—"even if a devil incarnate should organize so fiendish a cult, the physical impossibility remains. I know very little about snakes; but I understand they feed not more than once a month or so. A dozen disappearances in every month, then, as my converts said, could not by any stretch of even your imagination be accounted for by your horrible theory."

Relief came into his face. He even ventured to smile—in ghastly manner, it is true. His lips parted and his eyes lost some of their horror.

"Yes," King was forced to admit, "there you have me guessing again. Something doesn't fit. It's baffling. It's like no juju that I ever came across. But I'm almost hoping that I can find a lead to something. I've sent for that relative—brother or whatever he was—who warned your boys. Maybe he knows more than he told. I'm going to work a great magic on him, and he will, if he knows, lead me to the headquarters, the temple, the witch-house, or whatever it is, of this devil-devil cult."

The missionary stared at him. Since this hard and restless man had come into his life unbelievable phenomena of Africa had opened up before his dazed vision. He was prepared to expect anything now. Still he repeated the conviction of his two years:

"I am afraid, if your plans for destroying this horrible thing hinge upon finding a juju house, you are foredoomed to failure. I know my district, Mr. King. I assure you that within a radius of a day's journey there is no native building large enough to house a gathering of a dozen men."

King insisted:

"Somewhere is a headquarters, a big witch doctor, a juju grove, something I'm going to find it. I've *got* to find it, him, them. Without that we're up a bare pole. We know that a hideous thing happens. To destroy it we've got to know where it happens. Let's have the man in."

THE relative who had known enough about the dark business to warn his convert brother was ushered in. He proved to be a stupid looking hulk of a man, very frightened just now and inclined to be obstinate.

"Good!" muttered King. "The dumber the better." Sternly he said to the fellow, "I seek information. I desire to be led to the house of the big witch doctor."

Immediately the man's face assumed an expression of ox-like dumbness. His eyes stared white. In a mumble he began the conventional rigmarole—

"Nay, bwana, I am a poor man, a cultivator of—"

"Good," snapped King. "That means you know at least something. Therefore, by means of the witchcraft that I now put upon you, you will tell. Look now upon this fetish box. It was given to me by the Wizard of Elgon. The Old One. The Wise One. The strong witch-binder. The One-eyed who reads men's hearts. It contains a fetish older than age, wiser than wisdom, stronger than strength."

King flashed the dread box before the man's popping eyes. It was a little flat box of metal, golden in color, impressed with a fishbone design of fine lines having a mirror-like clear oval in the center. It contained a safety razor. King intoned some more mumbo-jumbo.

"The fetish that no man may look upon and live is the fetish of the lion's heart that is strong, of the eagle's eye that sees afar, of the ancient serpent's brain that knows all things. Now, therefore, by the power of this fetish that I shall press against the back of your head where the hole is through which the life cord enters, you will lead me to the witch-house of the big witch-doctor."

The man goggled at the potent thing that glittered in King's hand. Fearfully he backed away from it.

The missionary stared at King as horribly fascinated as the native.

"What? How can—? Good heavens, what mad thing are you doing?"

King darted forward and clapped the cold metal against the nape of the native's neck. The man groaned like a stricken ox and sank to his knees. From behind him King grinned at the missionary.

"Magic not so black as it looks. A simple little psychological hokum. I shove this great oaf before me, pretty well at random. Wherever he goes willingly I know I'm away off; where he hesitates I know I'm on the right path; where he instinctively shrinks, I know I'm hot on the trail. Tactile telepathy, the scientific sharps call it. It's no more than keeping a sharp watch on a man's reflexes. Surprising how often it works. So if this frightened fool knows anything he may betray it. I'm leaving Baroung-go on guard, and I told him to draft in your boys too. Ordinarily I'd not bother about juju by daylight. African juju works in the dark; it's got to use the dark to inspire the fear on which it builds its power; but I don't know what I may run into in this devilish business. I'm taking Kaffa and half a dozen *askaris.*"

King's first random cast in his essay at witchcraft was in the general direction of the rock carvings; and immediately he knew, from the native's unwillingness, from his readiness to turn into side paths, that he was on the right track. Of course, the success of the trick was cumulative. The more often the man was steered into a path that he would have avoided, the more he was convinced that he was inexorably under a spell.

Unlike the previous occasion on that path, villagers were encountered, at which King grunted satisfaction, for it meant that, this move on his part being quite unexpected, no man-traps had been planted in the path. The natives who passed stared at the spectacle of a badly scared man being dazedly propelled by a little gold box in the hands of this strange white man who had descended like a tornado into their village.

The Hottentot shrilled abuse at them.

"Away, away, monkey folk! A great magic goes on here. Not for common jungle people to see. Away!"

The common jungle people covered their mouths with their hands that evil might not enter and hurried by.

Passing the big reedy lake, King stopped. It was inviting. It had the attributes of sorcery. Green scum, slimy algae, floating reptilian heads. He scowled at the low island, half a mile out, drenched in the warm vapor that rose from the water as soon as the rain ceased. A stage setting for witchcraft. But, as the Reverend Henderson had pointed out, the bushes that grew on it, though lush and dense, were certainly not more than six or eight feet high, and certainly there was not a canoe hidden anywhere along the lake shore—King had sent a searching party out to make very sure of that.

The unwilling guide squatted on his heels and chewed a sort of a contented cud. He was betraying no knowledge of wizardry there.

KING left the place with a last longing look and pushed the man on, a half step behind him, keeping a firm grip of his arm with one hand while with the other he pressed the magic box against the back of his neck.

Immediately he felt the fellow's reluctance. King tested him out on a side path, deliberately steering him into one. The man's relief was obvious. King muttered at him:

"No. The fetish in the box tells me no. It says that this is not the path. Beware, foolish man, how you try to hoodwink the fetish that sees into the inside of men's heads. The witch-house of the big witch-doctor is where the

fetish wishes to be led."

He shoved the man back on to the trail that led toward the sculptured rocks.

The Hottentot clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth in awe.

"*Tla-awo!* It is indeed a strong fetish. For the man's knees are loose with fear, yet he leads the way."

Which was just what the wretched fellow was doing. His resistance to King's push from behind was beginning to be as unmistakable as his fear. King shoved him along, tingling with the expectation of success. If he could find the witch-house, the focal center of this cunningly hidden cult, his problem was solved. He would resort to simple strong-arm methods to break it up. That would mean a fight; somebody would get hurt; and there was no certainty as to who might be hurt most.

King waxed profane under his breath. Let him find the master mind who pulled all these strings from the security of his anonymity which he maintained by fear; that was the snake to scotch; the rest would be easy.

And then came a denouement that knocked his hopes high through the clouds that hung gray above him. King's profanity turned upon himself. Fool, he called himself, dolt and worse, for ever imagining that he understood the twists of the native mind.

Approaching the Reverend Leroy's settlement, the guide's reluctance became frantic. But inexorably King pushed him on, headed for the rock carving beyond and—he grew tense with expectation—some dark den of witch-doctory in the jungle beyond that.

And then the man, coming abreast of the Reverend Leroy's big circular chapel hut, bleating with terror, stopped there and goggled at the building as if the devil himself might emerge at any moment.

King stood dumbfounded. He knew from the wretched guide's abject limpness that, as far as he was concerned, this was the end of the trail. It was the Hottentot who voiced the complete deflation of their bubble that had seemed to soar with such buoyant hope. He spat.

"Awah, thuck-a! The fool has led us to the prayer house of the black man who has become a white witch-doctor."

And it was just that. The big witch-doctor, King had demanded; and who might more properly fill the rôle in a foolish savage's eyes than the burly black missionary?

Then the man moaned and cowered to the ground; for, as it might be verily a demon emerging from his den of mystery, the massive form of the Reverend Leroy loomed through the dark doorway of his chapel.

"Hello, Mr. Kingi Bwana," his voice boomed. "An unexpected visit, eh?" Then his face lowered angrily. "Why, what are you doing with that blockhead M'bangra in the charge of an armed force of *askaris?*"

He volleyed some guttural sentences at the man in a hybrid tongue that King did not know. They seemed half to reassure the groveling wretch; for he rose, and a thick grin began to replace his terror. Still half fearful, he shambled away.

"Those Gubkani tribesmen are all fools," the preacher explained, still with a trace of exasperation. "Some of his people are of my flock, and this dolt pesters me perpetually to set them free of the spell that he feels sure I have put upon them and to let them return to their pagan practice of dog meat sacrifices in order that the ants may not devour their yam crop.

"But come in. Wait just a moment till I lock my chapel door, and then won't you come into my modest home and let us resume our most absorbing little excursion into serpentology. I have been looking up and marking some references which I am sure will interest you."

King morosely shook his head.

"I'd be a poor sort of guest today, Reverend. I've been congratulating my-

self that I was on the road to finding out something about the Ponsonby mystery; but I've just received a severe kick in the slack of my self-esteem.

"And I'll tell you without being ashamed; when I'm out in this sweet district that you boost as being so peaceful I don't like to allow too much time for any smart hellion to fix up a little surprise for me somewhere on the way back. Thanks all the same, but I'll be getting along."

IF THERE had been any people among those who had noted King's trip and were therefore planning some ingenious deviltry along the return path King would have fallen an easy victim. He stalked along, his head sunk on his chest, seeing nothing. Precautions were left to the Hottentot who scuttled in advance with the alert suspicion of a monkey.

King was immersed in his own dark thoughts, building extravagant theories, analyzing, tearing down.

He had been so full of confidence, so sure that he was on the right trail. And he was half sure still. That man had been so genuinely terrified, so desperately afraid that he was being bewitched into betraying—what? A colored missionary? Bah!

There was that blank wall again. That baffling checkmate. King thought he had discovered a forward move in the game; but the crafty opponent had every move covered. There seemed no move that King could make. He had explored every trail his mind could visualize. And here he was baffled, confused.

Yet—King swore—exactly what had that doltish native been so afraid of? What did he know, or think he knew, that he was so fearful of betraying in a Christian church? Of course, savage superstition might conjure up the most bizarre interpretations of Christian theology; but—

"Well, hell!" growled King. "One thing is damn sure; and that's that the other side has got to make the next move. My play is to watch and to miss nothing."

The only rational question that he evolved out of his long cogitation was to ask the Reverend Henderson—

"Have you ever been inside of Brother Leroy's chapel?"

"Why, er, no," said the Reverend Henderson. "He is not very orthodox, I am afraid, and—"

"What do you know about a hut just back of the sculptured rocks?"

"I, er—I didn't know there was a hut there. You see, it is rather in Brother Leroy's diocese, so to speak, at the other end of the village, and we don't like to be unduly inquisitive about one another's doings. I suppose it is just a native hut."

"One hut," said King. "Alone. Nothing else anywhere in sight. Does that sound honest native to you? I sent the Hottentot scouting yesterday after we had looked at those rocks, and he discovered it behind the bluff."

The missionary gazed at King with new apprehension.

"Was—is it big? Large enough to—"

He leaned forward, afraid.

King shook his head.

"Too small. Barely a one-man hut. Perhaps a prison. I'm going to see; and I want one of your boys, one who can lead me quietly by back paths where we'll meet nobody."

The missionary rose with determination.

King knew without asking what was in his mind. He wondered at the spirit that drove so sensitive a man to go out and fight this dark fearsome thing.

"All right." He shrugged. "But we must hurry. I didn't want to be caught out after dark; and I don't want to take any fool *askaris* because that devil-doctor is smart enough to catch one of them and play the same psychological hokum that I tried.

If I can help it he mustn't know what tree I'm shinning up till I'm ready to raid his whole gang."

THE convert was a shrewd enough black youth. Leading the two white men out of the back of the mission grounds, he chose winding back paths, barely used, overgrown with vegetation. Only once did they meet anybody, and then they heard singing as he came and they squeezed into the bushes till he had passed.

The hut was small, smaller even than King had expected, and not especially concealed. In fact, it rather flaunted itself on a little grass-grown eminence behind the sculptured bluff. Heavy jungle surrounded it, but the little hillock stood clear. King stopped warily at the jungle fringe and eyed the scene; and, doing so, his mouth twisted in disappointment. He had been hoping almost to find a prison cell. But even the missionary could see that the place was quite unfrequented by humans. The grass grew lush and untrodden; not a path led to the hut.

"The perfect site for a juju hut," said King, whispering in the stillness. "I don't mean a gathering place; a witch-hut; it should be hung all around with bones and claptrap and should be full of magic gimcrackery. But nary juju sign is there; the place is barren. Queerest witch-doctory I've ever come across."

He crouched low in the grass and wormed his way up the hillock, the missionary crawling less expertly behind him. Nobody seemed to be keeping guard over the place; no spears whistled out of the still jungle. Crawling round the hut, King pointed silently to a trail.

Five inches wide it was, as mathematically exact as if cut by a machine, and stripped as clean of the last vestige of grass as if shaved with a razor right down to the bare soil. From the jungle it came, an uncanny Lilliputian road that wound round an outcropping rock in one place and tunneled under a fallen tree in another; always exactly the same width and always swept clear of blade and twig. Right up to the wall of the hut the little road came, and there at a crack in the adobe it finished.

"Soldier ants!" whispered King grimly.

The missionary's eyes grew large.

"You mean—the man is dead?"

King refrained from any needless answer. He crawled on round the wall; and when he arrived at his starting place there was another queer discovery about that silent hut. It had no door! Unbroken by any sort of entrance, the wall circled it.

The missionary knew enough about Africa not to ask any foolish question. His face was haggard.

"Entombed alive! May God have mercy on his soul."

"One thing about rain-soaked adobe," said King shortly, "is that it cuts like cheese." He pushed his ready pistol back into its holster and drew out his hunting knife. Big chunks of the sticky material fell out before his silent attack. Soon he was at the bamboo core. He slashed away the cane lashings and wrenched away half a dozen poles at once. The inner lining of mud and straw was drier and harder. Working quickly, he undermined that and then a heave of his shoulder pushed in the whole section. The dim interior was exposed to his view.

The atmosphere within was not so foul as might have been expected—the thatch roof allowed for a certain seepage of air. King squeezed through the opening, the missionary with set face behind him. The hole was wide enough to admit some light; quite sufficient to see the gleaming white of a skeleton.

It was not the skeleton that both men had feared to find. On a raised pedestal of bamboo framework, it was a startlingly beautiful skeleton. Composed of innumerable fine bones in exact pairs on either side of a sinuous spinal cord; semicircular tapering bones, for all the world like a gigantic centipede. Round and round they coiled in a mountainous pyramid and at the very apex lay a flat skull, broad nosed, as big as a small shovel.

King had seen snake skeletons before;

but it was the monstrous size of this thing that appalled him. As wide as a man's body was the spread of those curving rib bones. The length of the brute he could only guess; but his estimate made it at least thirty feet.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "A snake like that could do it easy."

"Do what?"

The Reverend Henderson knew perfectly well what was in King's mind, but he dared not let himself accept the thought. King put words to it.

"Just what the rock picture showed —gulp down a man, or maybe more."

The Reverend Henderson covered his eyes with his hands.

"Incredible," he moaned. "Incredible."

King stared at the awesome thing, marveling at its size and symmetry. He had never been repelled, as some people are, by snakes; and this thing was really an extraordinary work of art in its interlaced curves that mounted up and up in constantly decreasing circles to its apex. Picked meticulously clean by the ants; not a bone displaced; everything intact; a perfect museum specimen.

Only the head. King stepped closer. The broad skull that caped the apex was cracked; cut apparently by some sharp instrument; and that explained the death of the reptile.

"So that's it," said King. "This juju business is a snake worship with human sacrifices. Just like I thought. This was the god. Something killed it; and this is its shrine, walled up, inviolate, so nobody could monkey with it even if he dared."

"Incredible," murmured the missionary again. "Incredible."

King from his closer position saw what he had overlooked before. He thrust his hand between some of the curving ribs and brought away a small object, a small circular thing some four inches in diameter, with a dull sheen.

"Incredible, you say? Look at that. D'you know what that is? That's a native bracelet; brass; the only part of a victim that a snake couldn't digest. And look in there; that'll be a nose ring. Proof enough, I guess. And there's—"

King stopped short and, regardless of sharp bones, plunged his hand into the mass. He gave one close look at what he found, and it seemed that the sun tan paled from his face. He gripped the thing in his fist and stood tense and silent.

"What—what is it?" The Reverend Henderson asked in a quavering voice.

King opened his hand. What he held was a piece of gold dental bridge work.

The Reverend Henderson shrank away from it and covered his eyes once more. No words came from him; his whole body shuddered.

"I guess," said King very grimly, "we've found poor old Ponsonby. Let's get away from this ghastly place."

THE Reverend Henderson slumped in his uncomfortable chair. It had been a strenuous day for him. His eyes were closed against the light from the little kerosene oil lamp upon the massive communal table that almost filled the rest of the room; yet weakly he insisted upon denying the existence of further evil in the district where he had labored for two years. King strode up and down on the other side of the table, stopping only to fire arguments at him.

"So that's how the thing must have happened," King summed up. "Ponsonby found out too much. They grabbed him and put him up for sacrifice. The orderly was marked. 'Dedicated!' he kept babbling. Maybe he saw the thing happen; maybe, if that rock picture is true—and it has proved up so far—he was next in the line; one of a string to be 'devoured without trace'. Good Lord, that would drive any man crazy! We don't know how he ever got away; but I tell you, Padre—" King pointed his finger at the missionary and his thumb at his own chest—"you and I, we've found out too much. I'm not trying to scare you; but you've got to be careful how you go around on

your business, visiting your sick and all, alone, away out in the bush like I've seen you do."

The Reverend Henderson let his head fall back against the wall.

"Thank God I need have no fear. The hideous thing is dead and this wickedness has ceased. Lacking their frightful idol, the cult must decline. With God's help we can stamp out the last vestiges that still cling."

Skeptically King expected no immediate help from any deity to stamp out a ferocious cult that had flourished until a short month ago—the time since Ponsonby had disappeared. He knew the tenacity of African superstitions. For any evidence to the contrary the cult was still going strong.

"I tell you, Padre," he argued, "dead cults don't set man-traps in the bush to murder people who are investigating them."

"Vestiges," repeated the missionary stubbornly. "The idolaters remain. Their god is dead. It is my function to deal with idolaters."

"But, Padre, that thing has been dead a month, by all indications; and your own converts have told you that eight men disappeared within the month."

The Reverend Henderson pressed his fingertips wearily against his eyelids.

"Dead snakes do not eat eight men," he insisted. "Nor, for that matter, as you yourself have agreed, could a live snake eat eight men within one month."

King swore under his breath.

"There you've got me, I'll admit. I don't understand that part of it—yet. But all the same, maybe they've got a new snake. This gang is a darn sight too active to be hanging on to the memory of a skeleton. What do you know, now, about snakes in this district? What's the current talk about big ones?"

Slowly the missionary removed his fingers from his eyes and stared at King. By sluggish inches one hand traveled down his face and dragged at his lower lip. There had been such tales, many of them; but he had taken them with the white man's customary grain of salt. With reawakened anxiety he nodded at King.

"Aa-ah!" King pointed his finger impressively. "Then I'll bet they've got another someplace. Don't argue with me, Padre. There's no trick to catching and caging a big snake. I know. I've caught 'em for zoos. Anybody who knows how can catch even a thirty-foot snake—let alone the possibility of anything bigger existing in these jungles. I tell you, Padre, this cult is alive."

THE Reverend Henderson covered his eyes again and bowed his head in his hands. He was too physically weary to find further arguments.

King was full of determination.

"We know half the mystery now. We've found out what this devilish business is. We've got to find out who is the clever devil and where he operates." He bit his teeth together. "And when I find him, by—" He did not complete the sentence. "One move he's got to make. One false move in his game, and you pray to your God, Padre, that I don't slip up on my end."

The next move in the game that was growing so dreadful in its uncertainty was made with a bold suddenness that even King had never expected.

Midnight had barely struck when a frightened convert came in, wet and glistening, out of the rain; and before the missionary could prevent it he clasped his knees and bowed his head upon his shoes. Moaning, he reported that his wife's brother, the one who had given warning about the devil-devil and had been put under the fetish by King, had not returned to his hut; that his womenfolk had waited and waited and had then inquired at neighboring huts and had finally searched the jungle paths; but had found no sign of the man. He had, in fact, disappeared without trace.

King whistled a thin note of alarm and sprang to his feet. He snapped out of the morose abstraction in which he

had been sitting. The table in the room, designed for communal gatherings, was an immense thing built of great hand-hewn planks two inches thick and supported by sturdy treetrunks for legs. King banged his fist upon it so that his rifle and cartridge belt, lying upon the farther corner, rattled.

"By God!" he swore shamelessly. "The fellow did know something. I knew it. He fooled me, taking me to Brother Leroy's; but somebody saw him leading me. The word went to headquarters. He was recognized as a possible source of danger and was removed. Slam, just like that." He crashed his fist upon the table again.

The missionary's white face stared at him. His lips moved in unconscious habit of prayer, but no spoken words came from them. King paced the room like an animal in a cage.

"Somewhere," he insisted. "Somewhere is a key to this hellish business. The man can't be so clever that he leaves never an opening. Somebody must know something—if I could but catch such a one and beat it into his thick skull that I'd protect him from this devil that has them all scared dumb and blind. By golly, I'll tear this village apart hut by hut. Somebody will show me the key."

The Reverend Henderson sat with his hands folded.

"I hope so, Mr. King. I pray so. We walk in darkness and the shadow of death. O Lord, enlighten our darkness."

In answer to which the thin rain whispered on the thatch and heavy drops chuckled in the puddles below the eaves.

King prowled back and forth, grumbling to himself like a bear.

A houseboy stood trembling at the door. A man had brought a message, he said.

King sprang at the boy.

"Where?" he demanded. "Bring him in. Who is the man?"

But the man had not waited. He had come in the rain, the boy said, secretly, his face covered with a cloth so that nobody should ever be able to say who he was. He had whispered his message and he had fled.

The message was that if indeed the fierce new bwana was not afraid to make war upon the devil-devil and to deliver the people of the village from its devourings, then let him know that the black drums were talking even now in the place of the rock carvings.

King made one long stride to snatch up his rifle. The next step carried him to the door. He called:

"Kaffa! Barounggo! Quick! Six good *askaris!*"

He swung round to the missionary.

"Sorry I can't take you, Padre. I don't doubt your nerve; but this is a matter of speed, and maybe a stiff scrap in the dark. Watch out while I'm away. One thing is, if that gang is busy doing juju at the rocks, they won't likely be coming raiding here. By golly, maybe this is that clever devil's false move. Ready, Barounggo? Away! Away!"

THE raiding party came into the vicinity of the rocks without having stumbled over any greased watchers or having sprung any man-traps. It had taken time; for even on the most circuitous route King had been infinitely cautious. The rhythmic drone of the drums had long since ceased. But a dull glow of light glimmered through the bushes. A voice mumble-jumbled words. Other voices moaned a responsive chant.

King reached his hand into the wet darkness and drew the Masai close to him.

"How many of these four whom you have picked, if we see what I think we may see, will stand and not run?"

"Nay, bwana," the Masai whispered back. "Have I not picked them knowing that death stalks in the night? The six will stand."

"Good. Listen then: If we are discovered and attacked, let no fool run bleating into the jungle, but stand back-to-back. So may we win clear. For-

ward now, more silently than snakes."

On their stomachs the men wormed through the dripping underbrush. King squeezed his face through a tangle of scrubby roots, and the dim view that he achieved offered him the first cause of elation that he had found since he had started on this quest. It was the small number engaged in the gruesome rite. Not more than thirty dim figures moved in the light of the torches that sputtered in the rain. It bore out what the converts had said—that this dark cult was restricted to a carefully chosen band of initiates; and that, of course, also accounted for the secrecy which it had been able to maintain.

The ceremony, whatever it was, had proceeded well on its way. King could see only that the votaries squatted on their heels in three irregular lines before the low granite bluff upon which were carved the serpentine figures, and that they swayed in unison to their moaning chant.

Facing them with his back to the rock stood an enormous black man painted and made up with all the grotesque imagery of African art to resemble a devil. White circles enlarged his eyes; great white teeth were painted on to his lips; goat's horns added to his height; necklaces and armbands of bones hung about him. Flanked by two torches in the hands of deputy demons, he presented as fearsome a picture as the most debased superstition could conceive.

The devil-doctor mumbled some sort of litany, and the congregation swayed on its heels and chanted its response. King could catch only the jumbled rhythm; he was too far distant to recognize words. Quite clearly the ceremony was being conducted with a careful regard to quiet secrecy in the rain and dark. It had progressed to a point at which it became startlingly clear that the fantastic devil personification was not by any means the object of veneration; he was no more than the high priest of rites that were more gruesome than himself.

Sacrifices apparently had been made. Feathers again. King could distinguish white feathers at the demon priest's feet, wet and bedraggled in the rain. Now a single soggy boom sounded from a hidden drum. The devil-doctor raised his arms above his head. He loomed gigantic in the smoking torchlight.

Then King tensed to the word that he had trailed through so many dark and twisted ways; the word that had associated itself with fear beyond human reason.

"N'gamm-a!" intoned the devil priest with a deep inflection that boomed like a drum.

"N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!" wailed the congregation.

The blacks heaved forward on their hams to bow their heads to the ground. In that position they remained, faces in the mud, moaning and groaning the dread word; and then a movement commenced over the brow of the granite bluff above the priest's head. A movement that drew a startled gasp from King and caused him to snatch his pistol from its holster.

Spasmodic gulps and shufflings in the brush beside King were evidence that the others had seen the fearsome thing too. Then a warning growl from the depths of the Masai's belly, and the shufflings stilled.

Over the rim of the rock the head of an immense snake began to appear. Broad and flat, the size of a small garden shovel, it hung there motionless; then it turned its neck to look this way and that.

"N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!" groaned its prostrate votaries. Their bodies were contorted in Negro ecstacy; their voices rose to a clamor.

Immediately, like some demoniac bandmaster, the devil-doctor shushed and toned down their ardor. Blood-chillingly careless of the great head that swayed above him, he devoted his whole attention to quelling the hubbub of the worshipers. Slowly the head swung down to him.

Stiffly. Too unnaturally stiffly.

And then King's tension escaped from him in a long, windy whistle. He could see that the thing was manipulated by men from above. The great head was a mask; the body was a hollow of woven grass, painted in flowing triangles and circles.

Grotesquely the thing twined and swayed in imitation of a vast serpent. Its neck arched high; it curved down to nuzzle at prostrate men. In the dim torchlight it was horrifyingly life-like. It slid down off the bluff. With gruesome realism it opened its great jaws and made as if to engulf a man whole. Its devotees beat their heads upon the ground and moaned its dread name:

"N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!"

It smacked its lips and moved on to another victim.

WATCHING the fantastic ritual, King knew that these men were not engaged in any exaggerated play-acting; they were reproducing something that they had seen, something that they knew to be true. A thought flashed to him, a bold idea which he turned over in his mind as he lay. He surveyed the scene, the numbers. Scowling, he calculated distances and possible obstacles. Then his tight lipped ghost of a smile hardened on his face and he wriggled backward from his position.

Feeling in the dark, he found the Hottentot and the Masai and drew them together. To them he whispered his thought.

"Look you now. Those are men, full already of a fear that they make in their own minds, unsuspicious of danger, feeling themselves secure from observation. Moreover, worshipers; weapons not to hand. If therefore we rise suddenly out of the dark with a great outcry and a shooting off of the guns that these Shenzies have brought, it is in my mind that in the confusion and the aimless running we may capture that devil-doctor."

He waited to learn whether the idea was too entirely reckless to stand the judgment of his two henchmen. The Hottentot was the first to assimilate it.

"And that one being without doubt the chief," he whispered, "so would the head of the serpent be crushed."

"We be eight armed men," said the Masai gravely. "Let us rush upon them shouting our war cries and slay before they find their weapons in the dark."

With that much assurance of cooperation King was encouraged. The object to be gained justified the risk. Cautiously he gathered his men and gave his instructions. They were all to burst out together with all the uproar of a surprise attack, yelling, calling upon imaginary hosts, shooting off guns. King and his two henchmen would make a rush for the devil-doctor; the others would act as supporting interference wherever they saw fit. If attacked, they would get their backs to the serpent rock and fight it out.

The very boldness of the plan was the reason for success more complete than King imagined. Secrecy of personnel was the basis of the fear by which this dark cult ruled—anonymity and the silent suddenness with which it snatched away its victims. It was the tried and tested method of any secret police. And should fear alone be insufficient to deter prying eyes, should some bold investigator elude the watchers of the outer approaches, the cunning organizer had foreseen even that and had drilled his people accordingly.

At the first shout of the attack the giant devil-doctor roared an order. Immediately every torch was plunged into the nearest puddle. Black darkness blotted out the scene. No man of the worshipers yelled in aimless African confusion; only the fast pad and splash of running feet betrayed flight.

King charged forward in the darkness. Naked bodies lurched past him. He collided with one man and flung his arms around him. The fellow was too small; it could not be the burly witch-doctor. He hurled the captive from him and

plunged on. Ugh! He barged into another and recoiled from the collision. An answering grunt came from the darkness and a heavy blow thudded on the side of his head. Ears ringing, he ducked low and lurched for the man's waist.

Another grunt answered the impact of his shoulder. Powerful arms gripped and whirled him around. His own clutching hands felt dangling festoons of ornaments. His heart surged with a fierce exhilaration. This one felt more like it. This must be the burly devil-doctor himself. But King had a fight on his hands. He locked a leg behind the other's knee to trip him; but the ponderous defence to that was a blow that descended on the back of his neck and had him clinging dizzily.

"Bwana! Bwana! Where?" came the voice of the Masai.

"Here!" grunted King. "To me! No spear play. Hold him."

King tore one arm free and repaid the punch by hacking down over the other's kidneys. That fetched an answering grunt.

The Masai joined the struggle.

Like a bull the big witch-doctor plunged and heaved between them. In the thick blackness no one knew whom he held or whom he hit. King, straining mightily against muscular limbs as hard as his own, was aware of the thud of heavy feet receding. His earlier surge of exhilaration reversed itself to a plunge into bitterness as he realized that he was wrestling with his own Masai.

The footsteps died into the bush. Far rustlings still sounded here and there. In the amphitheater before the rocks was only the sound of groping men. King swore loudly into the night and fished his flashlight from his hip pocket. But that had been thoroughly crushed in the fight. It took time to open up a waterproof matchbox and by the light of carefully cupped sticks to survey the damage.

King held in his hand a length of necklace composed of teeth and other symbols of sorcery. The Hottentot had a man's dirty loincloth. The others had nothing. The Masai was worst off. He bled freely from his smashed nose.

"Upon that one," he growled, "will I yet lay my hands and rend his bowels from him."

King had a guilty recollection of having planted a full blow upon somebody's nose in the dark, but of that he said nothing.

"Home," he ordered. "And fast. That devil is clever enough to organize an ambush on the way."

IT WAS dawn when King arrived at the mission. In spite of his failure he was keyed up with elation. He had been at grips with that elusive devil-doctor, and ideas had been racing through his brain.

"Padre," he told the Reverend Henderson, "you've got to help. Oh, I know you've been doing your utmost; but it's your converts who've got to help; and you've got to make them. I guess you know by this time that black men—the very best of them—know things and talk things that you never dream. I've known it all along. Now nobody can tell me that your converts don't know a few more things that they've never told. They've been scared witless. But already they've spilled more than they've ever whispered in all your two years; and you've got to make them tell more; or if they don't know, they've got to go gossip in the village and find out more.

"As smart as this devil-doctor is, some one of his people must have talked a little to somebody. I've got the beginnings of suspicions, horrible suspicions. But I've got to know more before I dare make a move. I've got to have a key; and to find the key I must have some native help. We're at a stage where this thing has gone beyond white man's sleuthing.

"What natives will never tell us they'll tell each other; and I want you to send your boys out to rake up information. I want you to do it right away. This cunning devil-doctor knows now that

we're on to his game, and we must act fast before he can think up some new hiding—or maybe he's bold enough to take the offensive on a large scale. This is war now, Padre. I'm going around to see about the morale of my own crowd. You go and see what you can get out of your converts. Tell them we'll protect them; get that scare out of them."

KING'S plans and exhortations took up his whole morning. The men were badly frightened. Talk of magic and devil-devil had been spread insidiously among them; and not a man of them knew just how or by whom. This one had heard that such a one had said, and so-and-so had been told by somebody else; and that was as far as King could get.

Heard what? Said what? But nobody knew just what. There was a devil-devil that devoured men. That was all. And there was the stark proof of the man who had dared to give a warning and had immediately disappeared.

There was no arguing against that, no cajoling. King cursed in helpless fury; but he knew better than anybody else the effectiveness of Africa's age-old weapon against the white man. With the exception of his two staunch boys he knew that the rest of his men were useless, ready to run at the first sight of a painted face in the night or the first blare of a ghost gong.

He came into the house, very serious. The things that he muttered to himself were through hard-clenched teeth.

The Reverend Henderson was dejected.

"I could learn almost nothing. It is my honest belief that my people don't know. The secret has been too fearfully kept among its votaries. It is generally known that a secret cult exists, and my one consolation for not having learned of it is that the villagers have scarcely dared to talk about it among themselves, not knowing who in their very midst might be a member."

He flung out his hands helplessly.

"Verily, Mr. King, as it is written in Revelation, we are face to face with that old serpent which is the devil. This is one of those manifestations of evil that the good Lord in his wisdom permits from time to time for the trial of men's souls; and—"

"My Lord!" insisted King in his desperate impatience. "Were you able to learn nothing? Couldn't you get even a hint out of them?"

"Only," said the Reverend Henderson, "that this word, *N-gamma,* or whatever it is, seems to be the individual name of the devil-devil and that the cult is that of a horrible demon called by the curious name of Dumbell."

"What's that?" King whirled and gripped the missionary's arms so that he winced. "What was that name?"

"Dumbell," repeated the missionary, his pale eyes wide with apprehension at King's vehemence. "As nearly as I could gather from them, just Dumbell."

"A-a-ah!"

King slowly let go of the missionary's arms and drew away from him. He was suddenly very calm. A hard grin that had long been absent from his face came back to it. His chest and shoulders expanded with the throwing off of a weight.

"The key!" he whispered. "At long last the key! And it fits! Hell, why couldn't I stumble on that before? But here in Africa where it doesn't belong! Good Lord, who will ever understand Africa?"

His finger pointed his conviction.

"Padre, do you know what your boys' Dumbell is? It's Dambala, the serpent god of voodoo. And it all fits. It fits everything—and it's going to shock you harder than anything yet.

"Voodoo doesn't belong in Africa—and that accounts for the discrepancies that couldn't jibe with juju. Voodoo is dumb African superstition transplanted by the slaves to the West Indies and there enlarged by the sharpened im-

aginations of the slaves' descendants, embellished, built up away beyond crude juju into the fantastic horrors conceivable by black men who have been taught all about the Christian's devil. Those feathers! White roosters are sacrificed in voodoo rites. Those goat's horns that the witch-doctor wore—the emblems of a voodo priest or *papa-loi*. Every item of it fits. Gosh, why couldn't I tumble to it before? But who'd have thought to find it in Africa?

"And the man. Educated. Talking English with just a trace of an accent. Clever enough to organize this thing and to run it the way it's been run. Hounded out of his own island, maybe, by the local police. Now hold steady, Padre. All that you know about Brother Leroy is that he came from some West Indian island."

"Mr. King!" The Reverend Henderson sprang to his feet. "The Reverend Leroy is a Christian missionary! He has been doing a great work; his converts' devotion to him is a—"

King brushed him aside.

"Yeah? Who told you?"

His conviction was growing on him.

"A missionary of what? He was vague even as to his denomination. What converts? How many? Just the brothers of his cult. Most of the people here, as you yourself have pointed out, are a good bunch of fighting men, too straightforward for crazy horrors. And the only two buildings in the district big enough to house a gathering, as he had the nerve to point out—golly, how he must have laughed—are your chapel and his. And that poor devil of a man who disappeared led me straight to his. And you've never seen inside of it. It fits, I tell you. Every last little bit fits." He flung away and paced the floor with long strides.

The Reverend Henderson stood staring at him miserably. The accumulation of facts was inevitable. He could find no excuses or explanations. King whirled on him again with outthrust finger.

"And I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to raid that chapel! Oh, I know the trouble he can make for me with the government if I'm wrong. I'd have to leave the country; my reputation would be blacker mud than this whole business is black. But—" he continued with determination—"I'm going to raid."

His eyes blazed with exhilaration and the excitement of discovery. His stride was a nervous prowl as he laid his plans.

"Tonight. As soon as it's dark. I'll take men enough to fight his gang off. I can muster enough of them for that."

The Reverend Henderson sank back into his chair. His slender body shrank into its hard angles. It's hand-hewn African hardwood engulfed him. He looked very frail and small. His world as he had known it had crumbled to black dust.

IT WAS dark when King and his picked party slipped away from the mission. Men had been sent scouting the nearby paths an hour in advance to hunt out any possible watchers. No warning must be permitted to reach that clever adversary. A thin drizzle made the night black.

More roundabout than ever, King made a convert lead the way. The farther they progressed, the deeper grew King's frown; for, as once before, no villagers were encountered.

"Warned off," growled King; and to the convert, "Feel out every foot for man-traps even this far out. In spite of all precautions that devil suspects something."

To the Masai—

"Pass the word down that if we're attacked in ambush the torchmen will light up instantly, stick the torches in the ground and every man take cover."

No ambush, however, was encountered. But a drum throbbed dully. King drew the Hottentot to him.

"The same signal, apeling, is it not?"

"*N'dio bwana.* The signal of gathering. By some magic he knows and he

gathers his men."

Going with infinite caution, the raiding party came finally to the so-called mission settlement without having encountered mishap or man-traps. They had made a complete circuit and stood grouped now at the edge of the clearing on the far side.

The straggling huts loomed shapeless among the banana leaves; the patter of rain upon their wide surfaces was the only sound. High above the general mass was the dimly outlined dome of the chapel with its ostrich eggs against the sky. All of it was menacing, as if silently waiting. Not even a dog barked.

At an African village such a phenomenon was cause for suspicion. But the Hottentot said with callous matter-of-factness—

"A snake god, if its taste be not entirely spoiled, will at a pinch eat even dog."

King marshaled his men according to a simple but effective plan. He and the Hottentot with a brace of torchmen were to rush the chapel. The Masai and the rest were to act as outside defence.

"Watch more carefully than ever in your lives," warned King. "That cunning devil is up to something. Now Kaffa and I go first, and the rest of you deploy out around the building. Quietly if we can. Barounggo, if by chance they are all inside, waiting in silence, upon my call charge your men in. Come ahead."

It was with something of misgiving that King found himself before the dark recess of the chapel door; he had met not a soul in his cautious crawl and he did not know what peculiarly hellish thing his adversary might be up to. The door, of course, was locked. King took a long breath. So far, good; but now for whatever might be inside.

Nothing was to be gained by waiting. Already the dark forms of the Masai's men were shaping up behind him. He drew back, felt the distance and lunged his shoulder at the door.

It was built of massive, hand-cut planks, but it was set in a frame of bamboo and adobe mud. The whole thing tore out under his impact. He lurched into the darkness, sprawling over the wreck of it. Immediately, mindful of spears waiting at the entrance, he rolled over and over to the middle. The first thought that flashed to him was that he encountered no furniture, only a bare mat floor. He heard feet dash in behind him. On the instant he was on his own feet, tense in the blackness.

No spears. No breathing of crouching men. A match sputtered to a pitch torch and shortly its smoky light flared and revealed emptiness.

No benches, no chairs, not even the crudest kind of church furniture. The big circular floor space was bare—a meeting place for naked men, that was all. But piled against the walls was an assortment of other things that proved King's suspicion.

At any moment he expected to hear the uproar of conflict outside. Hurriedly he swung the torch round the walls. The adobe surface was ornamented with crude anthropomorphic designs, most of them obscene like those on the sculptured rocks. Predominant was the symbol of the eyes and the forked tongue.

Hanging from pegs thrust into the adobe and in untidy piles upon the floors was a collection of all the gimcrackery of African witchcraft coupled with the paraphernalia of voodoo—bones, animal skulls, dried embryos, woven grass masks with painted eyes; and with them goatskins, horns, bladder-rattles and phallic objects.

In one corner, black and shiny with use, the drums, a pair of them—big voice and little voice; the black drums that only an hour ago had been talking a message of deviltry into the night.

But it was still something else that King sought. Quickly he made the circuit of the great room, kicking away piles of skins, lifting floor mats, peering behind the raised altar. It was a den

or a pit of some kind that he hoped to find; some sort of cage or something that might house a big snake. But nothing of the sort came to light. Only the hanging objects and the disorderly piles ranged along the wall.

Still no sounds of conflict came from outside. King went to the door. His spearmen stood in an irregular line before it. Torches had been lighted, and they sputtered in the rain. The untidy hut groups stood silent, the open spaces between them empty.

The Masai's big shoulders loomed up from the direction of the little whitewashed house. He laughed as he reported:

"We have been fearing shadows in the emptiness, bwana. They have gone. By some devil's trick they knew that warriors came. The drums spoke the signal, and they have fled."

But King could conceive of no such tactical error on the part of so shrewd a man as Brother—or to name him correctly—Voodoo Papa-loi Leroy. He was filled with a very wholesome suspicion of that man's every move.

"More likely," he grunted, "the drums signaled the gathering for some devil business in the woods."

"Kss-ss-ss!"

The Hottentot snatched a torch to peer at a trail on the ground. The men stooped to look and clapped their hands over their mouths. Ox-eyed, they stared at it and fearfully they cast glances over their shoulders into the shadows.

From the door of the voodoo house the trail ran, a smooth swath in the moist ground. As thick as a man's body, it wound away into the darkness. The Hottentot whispered the thought that awed all of them.

"Such a trail is made by a snake. A snake big enough to devour men. The very father of all snakes."

King scowled down at the wide track, deeply impressed by a great weight. An involuntary chill crept up and down his spine. What new and incredible trickery was this? Naked footprints showed alongside the wet spoor. King gnawed at his lower lip. Was it humanly possible that a monstrous thing like that could be trained? Could it be herded along on a sacrificial hunt with its attendant ghouls pattering on swift feet alongside? In the drizzly dark of that deserted and silent voodoo den he was ready to believe any diabolism of Papa-loi Leroy.

"Up! Up!" he ordered. "Home! And by the shortest route. To hell with man-traps—they'll be set the other way anyhow. Get going. The very devil is abroad this night."

NOT a soul was encountered on the path; though in places it wound among outlying clusters of huts. Never had a trail been so deserted. But the Hottentot, pattering ahead with a torch, testing, literally nosing out the trail, announced—

"Men have passed this way before us; and with haste, stopping not even to reset these empty traps behind them."

Men. In haste. On the trail that led to the mission. Apprehension began to reach cold fingers toward King's heart.

Never were hut groups so silent; not even the glimmer of a dried dung-fire showed between the chinks where the rain had eroded the mud plaster. But that, King knew, was to be expected when the black drums had given warning that juju walked in the night.

King's apprehension as they drew near to the settlement became certainty when that, too, showed no signs of life. Not a light shone from the little mission house; there was not a sound.

"Something wrong. Come ahead! Baroungo, watch out for ambush."

He dashed forward. His gun had been ready to his hand throughout that jungle trail. No challenge came at the mission gate from the *askari* whom he himself had posted. In two leaps he was across the compound. The mission

door was an open black shadow.

"Padre." King called through the four rooms. "Padre, are you all right?"

Not a sound. Running, King kicked open the back door. Beyond the empty rear compound the convert huts stood dark and silent. King snatched a torch from the nearest man and raced to a hut. He kicked the door down.

Within the hut, huddled with blankets over their heads, were men. Cursing, King kicked them till, howling, they found their feet.

"What happened?" King stormed at them. "What hell's business has been here?"

White eyed, they goggled at him.

King took the nearest one by the throat and shook him.

"What happened? Speak, idiot, damn you, or I'll beat your dumb face in!"

Then they all gave clamorous tongue at once. Men had come—men with grass masks over their faces. Not men—devils. They had slain the *askaris,* or the *askaris* had run away; they did not know. The devils had seized the *mon-péré,* their master, thereby proving that their power was greater than the *mon-péré's* god. Those who had not been seized had barricaded themselves in their huts or had fled into the jungle.

King leaped to other doors. Without prelude he kicked them down. Within were other cowering men. King kicked them too. They knew nothing. Nobody knew anything. Masked devils had come; that was all.

King swore into the night. The Masai's dark form bulked beside him. Imperturbably he reported:

"Seven we find slain. Two will live. The rest—" He shrugged his shoulders. "A full day will I expend in administering beatings."

"Up!" shouted King. "Up! Beat those frightened fools to work! That devil had the same thought to raid here while we raided there; and his is the greater gain. Up and after them, and we may yet come in time."

"After them indeed," said the Masai. "But where in this night? If one of these fools upon whom that good man has wasted his labor had but the wit to follow and bring word—"

King had an inspiration.

"The lake!"

He revolved the thought in his mind and his eyes glowed. He nodded his conviction. "Yes, the lake! There can be no place other than that island."

"Awah!" Even the Masai recoiled at the prospect. "A fit place, indeed, in the midst of that evil water, for a devil serpent that devours men. But, bwana, without a canoe how could even that devil doctor do such a witchcraft?"

"That trail!" King was running to the mission. "The trail that led from the voodoo-house door. It was not a giant serpent. It was a canoe dragged along by men. That's where that cunning devil kept it hidden. To work! Beat those men to work!"

The Masai roared among the shivering converts. With kicks, blows and pricks with the point of his spear he set to herding them into the mission-house. How, without a second canoe, anybody might traverse that crocodile-infested water, he had no idea. But his faith in his master was immense. If the bwana said he would go to the island, no matter what the difficulties, no matter what the odds might be when he should get there, to the island he would go. Without asking questions the great fellow collected and bullied the men to whatever work it was that the master planned.

King was heaving at the great community table; that ponderous thing of solid planking and young sapling legs.

"Of this we make a raft," he shouted. "Swift, swift, every man! Ropes, axes, chairs, beds, whatever there is! Kaffa, set two men to rip boards from somewhere and thin down shafts to make paddles. Speed! Speed!"

The table was a good ten feet long, and solid. Beneath it, just under the edge, ran a stout six-inch horizontal strip to give bracing to the legs; it was

a veritable coaming for a boat with the table upside down.

For a breathless moment King thought of felling trees and hewing logs, but the immediate shade trees of the mission were hardwoods. To go hunting through the jungle in the dark for something lighter was not to be thought of. Time was important.

There was no knowing what awful, unholy, gruesome rite might be progressing on that island.

Ruthlessly King smashed chairs, cupboards, all the meager furnishings of the place—anything that would float—and lashed the lumber thus obtained lengthwise along the table top. Heaving with half a dozen men, he turned the thing over. Furiously swinging an ax, he knocked the sturdy legs flying. They, too, went under to add buoyancy.

TIME sped inexorably; but so did the making of the raft. A mass of ropes and planks and odd firewood, it was finished faster than anything that had ever happened before in that part of Africa.

"Good enough," panted King. "It'll hold together. Now, then, get under it, every man! Hoist! Edgewise through the door, fools! The shotgun, Kaffa. It'll be a murderous weapon at close quarters; but this is a murderous business. Away! Away! Axmen ahead to clear the path! Speed! Speed!"

Supported by every man who could put shoulder to it, the cumbersome raft went lurching out into the night.

At the lake edge King stared in the direction where he knew the island should be. No glimmer of light came from it. No whisper of sound. It seemed that, if men moved on it at all, they groped their way in some nameless ritual of the deeper hell. Coupled with the blackness of night, the rain roared down upon the water's surface with a sudden fury that drowned out all other sound.

Gingerly, wary of the water's edge, the men pushed the raft in. It floated high. King's quick estimate was that it would carry five. That would be, besides himself and his two henchmen, two others.

But which two? Explosive grunts and staccato croaks came from the dark water. Who of those shivering men would be willing to go? And of what value would frightened men be in—in whatever it might be that would be met on that fearsome island?

It was no time for speculation. King pounced upon the two men nearest to himself, irrespective of whether his own or converts. He pitched them bodily on to the float. For half a mile they had to drive that cumbersome thing through reedy water; he wanted stout arms for paddles; he could not stop to pick fighting men. Speed! Speed!

He jumped on board after them. The raft lurched. The two men screamed. The Hottentot was already there. The Masai heaved mightily against the raft, wading knee deep to give it a good send-off. Then calmly he swung aboard.

"Crocodiles," he said coolly, "are more fearful even than these jungle people; they do not come where much noise is. Think you, bwana, that those devil men will fight?"

King did not at once reply. He drove great straining strokes with his crude board paddle. Things other than paddles splashed out of the darkness ahead. The raft gathered way. Once it bumped jarringly against something that grunted. Something swished and hit the water with a slap that sent a wave over the six-inch gunwale. A man groaned.

"Speed!" growled King. "Speed!"

"Even rain like a waterfall," panted the Hottentot between strokes, "is not without its virtue; for thus will the devils not hear our coming."

"And at least," said King with a grim satisfaction, "this time they will not be expecting any interference."

The low island loomed ahead, a blacker shadow upon the black water. King strained his eyes to distinguish a possible landing. Before he could ad-

just his sight to distances the raft grounded softly. The rain's fury was abating; but its patter upon leaves drowned out all sounds of the hurried scramble ashore.

A narrow fringe of weedy beach encircled the island. Beyond that were the bushes that could be seen from the main shore—dense, tough, a veritable wall. Stiff thorns against his groping hand quickly convinced King that passage through it would be a matter of machete work.

From within the wall, from the very belly of the island, there now sounded above the patter of the rain, like a bass accompaniment to it, a low, booming rhythm. Too low to distinguish words; but King had listened to that emphasized rhythm before.

"N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!"

When he had heard it before it was a prelude to the appearance of the great stuffed snake above the sculptured rock. Here on this island, what?

"Hell! There must be a path someplace. Quick!"

In a frenzy of anxiety they stumbled along the beach, which was littered with flotsam and driftwood, holding on to each other to keep their feet. The two extra men followed only because they dared not remain behind. A black shadow that lay like a log across the way grunted and scuttled into the water.

"The hell with them! Come ahead!" King whispered fiercely.

Other shadows slid away from their advance. The island was small and roughly circular. They had scrambled round perhaps a third of it when an immense shadow loomed ahead, full across the path.

Huge and black, disdainful of a handful of stumbling men, it refused to move.

King's hesitation was only momentary. Muttering something about hell, he ran at it and jumped high. Clearing it with room to spare, he landed, turned and stood his ground, laughing hysterically—but determined.

It was the dugout canoe.

Hauled well up, its nose stuck into a dark tunnel that opened through the tangled bush wall.

"N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!" The low rhythm sounded clearer now. At intervals came the terrifying drone of a devil's litany.

King plunged into the path, the Masai at his heels. The shrewd little Hottentot waited a moment and then his soft, insistent, whisper came from behind.

"The canoe would hold perhaps ten men, bwana."

"Hau! Perhaps then they will fight," growled the Masai.

"Perhaps," amended King grimly, "it has made more than one trip."

FORGING ahead by touch, King pushed his face into thorns. The rain drowned his sharp exclamation. The tunnel had suddenly zigzagged; and immediately King knew why. It was to hide the light. Ahead was a glow.

In a half dozen long, cautious strides King stood at the end of the tunnel; and all at once he understood the whole devil-begotten secret of the island. He understood why no structure was ever visible from the main shore, why no lights were ever seen—the dense bush tangle, of course, accounted for that. But structure there was, and no imagination was necessary to tell King just what its grisly significance might be.

The tunnel debouched into a space cleared of bushes, like the island, roughly circular, perhaps some sixty feet across. The structure in the center of the clearing was nothing more or less than a wide cage, a glorified mousetrap in which victims awaited whatever death their captor decided upon. The victims in the trap were the missionary and two of his converts. Just what form of death their captor had planned was not as yet apparent.

The cage was constructed of stout bamboo poles driven into the ground a

few inches apart, braced with crosspieces and strongly lashed with split canes. A flat top covered it, just above man height, similarly braced and lashed. A quite unescapable cage; in fact, an arena.

And like an arena, it was lighted. On little bamboo shelves, screened from the rain by matting, burned wicks of twisted bark floating in clay saucers of grease. Outside the arena, at intervals all round its circumference, stood men, black, stark naked, perhaps a score of them. They jigged a shuffling step to accompany the droned litany. Their responses fell in cadenced unison:

"N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a."

That ominous word had meant fear wherever King had met it. The last time it had preceded the appearance of a serpent god.

Fear was upon the jigging men now, though not the abject, face-in-the-mire reverence of the rock ceremony.

"Something queer about that," was King's immediate suspicion as he stood tense in the black shadow of the passage, on tiptoe to explode into action just as soon as he should know what and how.

He could have reached out his shotgun and touched the man directly in front of him. He felt almost as if the man must hear his breathing. But the fellow's whole attention was focused upon whatever it was that was happening—or going to happen—behind those bamboo bars. Farther down the line King could get a view of faces. They, too, were keyed to a pitch of expectant excitement that left room for observation of nothing outside. Blubbery lips trembled, eyes goggled white, features twitched. Brutal faces all. Debased. Like the faces of gorillas—or of devils.

And then it came to King why these people were not all bowed down to the mud at the word, *N'gamm-a.* This spectacle was not worship. It was sport.

Worship might come later. But these men were waiting for something to happen, some horrific thing that would glut that appetite for blood which was the necessary prelude to voodoo ecstacy.

Whatever it was that was coming, the Reverend Henderson inside the cage knew as well as did the fanatical audience. King could see him between the bamboo bars. He was upon his knees, his hands folded before him, his lips moving. His thin body was naked. Smeared upon his breast with yellow ocher was the symbol of the serpent eyes and the forked tongue. Hope had left him. He was praying.

King thought gravely that so must other Christians have prayed in an arena long ago as they waited for the lions.

As for the converts, terror had bereft them of all voluntary motion as well as speech. They lay on the ground, caked with mud; at intervals their bodies twitched spasmodically; their eyes rolled in their heads. Then King saw that dirty cloth gags covered their mouths.

It was on the farther side of the cage that all eyes seemed to be so hypnotically fixed. Vision there, through a double line of bars and against the smoky grease lamps of that side, was not so easy for King. He could make out the big form of the voodoo *papa-loi* who droned the monotonous chant to which his lesser devils kept time. Beside him seemed to be a multiplicity of bamboo stems adjoining the cage, a sort of supernumerary cage, as it were; though its function remained vague.

The *papa-loi* waved his arms high in impious imitation of invoking a blessing, calling upon the spirit of his demon god to manifest itself before its people. And from the slavering excitement of its people it seemed that they saw something; that the god *was* manifesting itself.

Then King saw it too, and his heart came into his mouth. Having once discerned it out of the smoky gloom, he wondered that he had not picked it out before. Connecting the supernumerary cage with the arena cage was a square black hole, a sort of trapdoor, high up,

just below the ceiling. Out of this hole protruded a frightful head, enormous and flat, the size of a garden shovel. Motionless, it hung there. It might have been a wooden mask. But then a great bifurcated tongue licked out and flicked slowly up and down, tasting the air.

"*N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!*" intoned its jigging demons. Their nostrils twitched; they licked bubbling lips.

Unhurriedly a length of thick neck slid out of the hole and hung there hesitantly. This way and that the broad head turned to look—exactly as had the wooden one at the rock ceremony.

"*N'gamm-a! N'gamm-a!*" The rhythm speeded up its tempo. The stamping feet sent a tremor through the ground.

The cold-eyed devil-devil seemed to be satisfied with its scrutiny. With effortless ease a vast body began to flow out of the trapdoor. The great head arched gracefully down to accept its sacrifice.

The enormity of their effort brought stifled groans from the gagged converts. Their spasmodic jerking threw them bounding and skittering across the arena mud. The missionary, with the superhuman moral strength of a stout soul enclosed in a fragile body, remained on his knees and prayed to his God.

King's jump carried him right up to the bars of the cage. A naked body stood in his way. A back arm blow hurled the man sprawling. King shoved his shotgun between the bamboo bars and let go both barrels at once.

The great head and neck disintegrated into a red mass of streamers and ribbons. Like a vast rubber cable the body that had protruded jerked back into the hole. An agonized howl came from a naked man who had been watching the show from directly behind. A brief space of silence was caused by sheer astonishment. Then a vast writhing and a rending of wood from the supernumerary cage—and hell's pandemonium.

Shocked beyond all reasoning by the apparition entering their confident security, the devil-worshipers' single impulse was to bolt around either side of the trap to the protection of their *papaloi*. There they milled, a yelling mass, in the narrow space between the cage and the jungle wall.

"After them!" yelled King. "Don't let them get set!"

The Masai shouted his ferocious war cry of stabbing spears:

"*Ss-ghee, ss-ghee!* The devil-doctor is mine, bwana," he pleaded as he ran. "He who smote my nose is mine."

GIVING the devil his due, credit must be given to Papaloi Leroy. Bellowing rage and encouragement, he launched himself from the platform on which he had been standing and pushed a wave of his men before him. King found himself engulfed. His gun was knocked from his hand in the first rush. Hot, naked bodies pressed upon him. They shrank from him as from a materialized ghost; but sheer pressure of numbers in that confined space forced them on to King. Foot and knee and fist, he fought with yelling men who clawed at him more in fright than in battle rage.

He saw the Masai wading shoulder deep through screaming men, his great spear flashing redly as it rose and fell. But those were only obstacles in his path.

"Wait for me, Rainmaker," he shouted. "Hold fast, thou great one. *Hau!* Art thou running from an *elmoran* of the Masai among all thy demons?"

The terrific flailing of an enormous body in the supernumerary den began to burst the walls apart. Sections of bamboo flew in the air. With a splintering crash a whole side fell out. Something like a ship's hawser swept the feet from under the milling mob. A huge coil writhed high and fell crunchingly. Men howled beneath it and leaped frantically to avoid it.

King began to realize that the hands

that beat at him were weaponless. With relief he remembered that these men had come as spectators to a sacrifice; weapons, if any, would be stacked somewhere; probably left in the canoe. How long before somebody would gather his wits sufficiently to go for them? In desperation King put into practice every low, man-maiming trick that he knew—knee to the groin; elbow twisted till the bone cracked; rabbit punch. Men fell howling away from him.

It came to him with a sickening feeling that in all this confusion there was no sign of the Hottentot. Perhaps the little man had gone down. Under his feet King felt himself treading upon his gun. Risking everything, he fought down to get at it. Men howled and piled themselves on top of him. From somewhere outside of his own fight King heard a shot spit viciously. He heaved up out of a mound of men to see Leroy, a pistol in his hand, struggling over surging heads to bring his arm down and point it again at the Masai. The Masai roared and plowed through a barrier of bodies.

"There's for thee, father of devils!" he shouted.

The great spear licked out in a full arm lunge. A foot of it suddenly stuck out of the voodoo-doctor's back. He disappeared in the screaming mob; but the shaft of the spear with its monkey-tail tuft waved drunkenly in the air above their heads.

Seeing the Masai unarmed, a wave of men threw themselves at him, howling like the devils that they worshiped. The Masai went down; but from beneath the bodies his indomitable shout came:

"*Whau!* That was a stroke! Wait, devil's offspring. Wait but till I get my weapon again."

His voice was muffled. His breath came gaspingly. King wrenched free and swung his gun to waist height. He fired. Men writhed away, shrieking. Other men, finding King's hands engaged, clawed at him from behind. King swung round and fired blindly. It seemed that the whole pressure before him disintegrated. Only groans came from about his feet. He saw the Masai surge up out of a sea of men, his spear in his hand. The men yelled and broke before him.

The Masai had no inhibitions. Armed or unarmed, enemies were before him, men who did demoniac things. They fought against his master. His business was to slay them.

Before the threat of his spear they broke and ran. Shouting, he chased them. Round and round the cage he chivvied them. Some in their desperation dived for what they hoped might be thin spots in the bush tangle and there they stuck. They were speared. Some broke partially through. The Masai reserved them for a later hunting. Some climbed monkey-like to the top of the cage.

King smashed his fist into the face of the last man before him and was free to run and catch the berserk Masai by the arm.

"Have done! Cease, slaughterer!" he shouted and shook the man out of his red fury. "There is work. Cut me the cords of this door with your spear and let us get the *monpéré* out of this. Put him in the canoe under guard of those two cowards who would not follow; and then we must go and look for Kaffa."

The Masai was immediately sober.

"What? Is the little man gone? The apeling with whom I have had my daily quarrel? *Awowe!* Then will there indeed be a slaughter. Speed, bwana; he may yet live."

He sliced his spear blade against the fastenings of the cage door and plunged in with King. The skulkers on the roof scuttled away like spiders. The missionary had fainted. King took the frail body up in his arms. The Masai followed with a grease lamp.

At the tunnel's farther entrance dark forms sprawled on the beach. A goblin figure perched on the prow of the canoe. He started up and lifted a short Somali sword. Then he clucked.

"*Whah,* bwana! I thought it was another of them. One came like a fool, not looking, bellowing for weapons. Him I slew. Another came. Him also I slew. Yet another came. Him also—"

"Shut up!" said King. "Murderers twain have I for servants. Here, get the *monpéré* into the canoe."

"*N'dio,* bwana. But softly, bwana, softly. Spears are in the canoe and knives. Show a light, thou great oaf of a Masai, that we do not lay him upon sharp edges."

King held the lamp above his head and watched his incongruous pair tenderly handle the missionary between them. In the shadow he was not ashamed to let the hard lines of his face soften in appreciation of two black men who stood more staunchly by him than many a white man might have done. But bruskly he shook sentiment from him. His voice was gruff.

"Carefully now, carefully. Otherwise the gifts that it was in my mind to give for a little blood spilled in the right time and place will be forfeited for clumsiness. Come now, Barounggo, ungag those rascals and kick them to their feet. Then swiftly away from this evil place."

"And those others, bwana?" The Masai voiced disappointment. "Those devil men who have temporarily escaped? It would be a hunting like rats in last year's straw, bwana. Shall those evil ones go free?"

"They shall stay right here," said King grimly, "till we come and collect them in our own good time. If they hunger, let them eat their own dead, as do all devils. If they don't like this den of their own making, let them swim. Come, let's get going."

ONCE again the Reverend Henderson sat in a chair of stiff, hand-hewn hardwood—brought from Brother Leroy's "mission." King swung his legs from a sturdy table, late of the same place. The missionary was pale and exhausted; but his spirit remained unquenchable. King's grin was that of an archangel who has well and truly executed a major readjustment of the universe.

"So that just about cleans up that," he said. "They were pretty well tamed when I went to fetch them off their island—what was left of them. A boot at the exact psychological root of their tails and a sight of something to eat brought out a whole basketful of confessions. The mystery is very simple—I mean about their snake's impossible appetite. I should say Leroy had a complex about slaves; he couldn't forgive the white men who had run off his own parents; so when he got into trouble in Jamaica over his voodoo stuff he came over and started a slave racket right here in British territory, knowing that the Abyssinians would be blamed; and to cover up disappearances here he organized his Dambala devil cult and had them believing that it got *all* the victims. The slaves marched up into Abyssinia and turned them over to the borderland chief, who took them quietly through Jubaland to the coast, where Arab dhows picked them up for sale in Hadramaut.

"A right smart lad was Brother Leroy. He was making a pile of money out of his game and he sent it all away to the coast; must have banked it somewhere; though these poor dupes, of course, couldn't understand anything about that."

"Thank God for that," said the missionary piously. "And did you find out about—about that unhappy orderly?"

"That too. They put up a scrap, he and poor old Ponsonby. The gang was afraid they'd upset the canoe in the middle of the lake, so they were tied up. But the orderly seems to have managed to pick up a *panga* knife in the dark and concealed it somehow. The snake got Ponsonby and was kind of taking things easy, sniffing around the other. It was then that his mind cracked. He howled and gibbered something awful, they said. It must have been a ghastly busi-

ness. But he managed to cut loose and, gone berserk, he took a tremendous swipe at the snake's head with his knife; didn't kill it outright; but that's what it died of later.

"Of course there was a tremendous confusion, what with the snake thrashing around in the cage and the worshipers struck dumb. And then the orderly, still howling horribly, burst through a rotten spot in the cage wall, hacked down a couple of men in his way and got clear away in the canoe. That's why they just had to go after him to get him back. The *N'gamma* died a couple of days later; so they put it away in its little hut to lie in state, and Leroy had his men out and caught the new one within a week. They tell me there's a warm water pool where the snakes come to shed their skins."

The Reverend Henderson was silent with closed eyes. Several times he shuddered. At last—

"What are you going to do with them?" he asked.

King knew that the missionary was thinking of men, not of snakes. Frowning in troubled thought, he kicked his boot heels together.

"I don't exactly know. If I take them in to Nairobi they'll be officially tried and hanged as accessories. Yes, hanged. Just for being dumb African fools, dupes of the devil Leroy, crazed by mumbo-jumbo. And then'll be more trouble."

The missionary opened his eyes and looked up.

What could be worse than the hanging of men? King nodded.

"Yes. Official trial will mean witnesses. You and me and dozens of these people. Investigations of local conditions. Police. Tribal punishment for not reporting the thing. Fines. Impressing of the prestige of the colonial government."

"Oh, Mr. King—" the missionary cried appealingly—"cannot that be avoided? Is there no other way?"

King nodded again.

"Sure there is—if your conscience will let you collaborate with me in throwing a little dust into the eyes of his Britannic Majesty's colonial government. A quite simple way. I can let Barounggo cuff their ears and give each of the gang a swift kick in the nether loincloth—in public—and then turn them loose. Their bad influence will be busted for keeps, and their own people will twist their tails plenty. And you can start all over again with a lot of knowledge that you didn't have before."

"I shall report to the governor that no slaves were being raided from Abyssinia—which is true; that Ponsonby was unfortunately killed by a snake—which is also true; that I have killed the snake—which is the truest thing you know.

"I shall write that report, and I shall keep away from Nairobi for a year—go exploring in Abyssinia maybe; lots of things in Abyssinia I've never seen. And you—" King pointed his finger at the missionary—"you will stretch your conscience and write an enclosure to my report to back me up with your O.K."

The Reverend Henderson remained silent, his head against the hard chair back. For a moment he was silent, his eyelids closed in thought. Then softly he murmured the quotation:

" 'Therefore shall I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey.' "

He sat resolutely upright.

"Mr. King," he gave his conviction, "it is my sincere belief that in this case the end justifies the means."

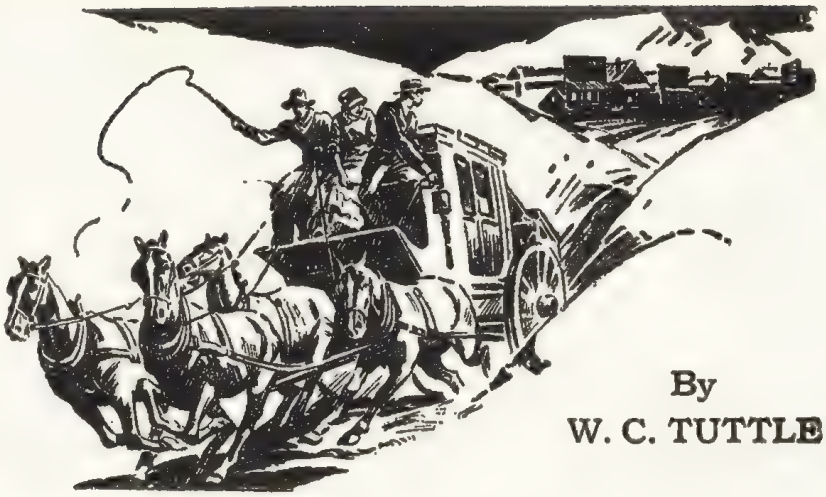
Weeks later, when the governor read that report—scrawled on a sheet of mission copybook paper—he told a scandalized secretary—

"File as officially accepted."

He drummed his fingers on his desk. Slowly a wise smile spread over his august features.

"Good man, that Kingi Bwana chap. Saved us no end of native trouble and military expenditure—and he always thinks we don't know. Some day I must catch him and find out what really happened."

"TUT" gives us a tale of a tough kid who took over a town



By
W. C. TUTTLE

TURKEY TRACKS

A MAN'S indrawn breath whispered—

"Turkey Track!"

And there he stood facing them, his back against the bar, while streamers of tobacco smoke eddied around him in the yellow light of the saloon's oil lamps.

Turkey Track! The man whom three of the five at the poker table had to stop at the little settlement of Sunrise. They were drawing a salary to prevent this man from reaching Bonanza City; and this was the first time in a week that at least one of them had not guarded the narrow cut of Sunrise Pass. These three were gunmen, but not one of them made a move toward a gun.

They all knew Turkey Track's reputation. True, they might down him; but some of them would go down with him, so swift and deadly was his draw. There was no question as to his identity. They were the first to look upon his features; but there were the famous black shirt, black sombrero, black batwing chaps on which, stamped in glistening silver rivets, was the insignia of the Turkey Track brand—the trade-mark of a cold blooded killer—to mark him.

None of Turkey Track's victims had ever seen the face of this young outlaw. He had always been heavily masked and dressed in black. Who he was, no one knew, but they watched for the rider in black, who wore these clothes.

Only a kid, this sinister figure. His nose was thin and pinched, his cheeks hollow, and his lips merely a thin line above a pointed chin.

"Where does your sheriff hang out?" asked the kid.

The five men shifted their eyes to look at one another. The Turkey Track Kid asking for the sheriff! One of the men swallowed painfully as he managed to inquire—

"Wh-what do you want him for?"

The kid looked at them intently. His voice was pitched low as he replied:

"I killed a man today. It was back yonder in the hills. My horse busted his laig and I had to shoot him. Then I found this here cabin and went up to the door. I shoved it open. There was a feller in there and he tried to throw down on me.

"I dunno who he was. He had a horse and saddle, so I took 'em. And I borrowed his chaps and gun. You see, I've got to explain it to the sheriff, 'cause it was self-defense; and I don't want no posse houndin' me around."

The five men relaxed. One of them

signaled a warning to the others and turned to the kid.

"Where'd this all happen, stranger?" he asked.

The young man was rather vague in directions, but his description was clear.

"The old Marsh place," said one, and the others nodded.

"What did he look like?" asked the freighter. "Old feller?"

"No, he wasn't old. Mebbe he's no older than me."

"And he tried to throw down on you?"

"Yeah. Tried to—like I told you."

"Well," said the freighter, "I wouldn't worry about seein' the sheriff. If you aint lyin', you've done killed the worst killer in the country."

"You don't mean that, do you?" queried the youngster.

"Look at the brand on them chaps. Don't that mean nothin' to you?"

"Nothin' but some silver rivets."

"You ain't never heard of the Turkey Track?"

The kid looked a little puzzled.

"Well, you see, mister—"

"You're kinda new in this country, ain't you?" asked the freighter.

"I jist got in here. Ain't this the road to Bonanza? Well, I've got a letter to a feller named Dan Belt."

"You have, eh? Well, that's fine—and funny."

"Funny?"

"Listen, young feller; you've wiped out the one man in the world that Dan Belt didn't want in Bonanza. Dan's men are strung all over this country, watchin' for the man you killed. Three of us are here guardin' the Pass—or supposed to be guardin' it. Dan's men in Bonanza are watchin', in case he slipped through.

"Why, there's a reward of five thousand dollars for Turkey Track; and you, jist a damn wet-behind-the-ears kid, comes along and gits it. But you can't ride to Bonanza in them clothes. You'd be killed before you could prove anythin'. We'll fix you up with other stuff."

"I wasn't shootin' for no reward," said the kid. He hesitated a moment.

Dan Belt, the man who was supposed to be protected from Turkey Track, was the head and brains of the crooked element of Bonanza City. He owned the liquor, gambling and honkatonk business. He bought high grade gold ore from crooked miners, owned the freight business and the stage lines.

"I've got a letter to him," repeated the kid.

"You have, eh?" said Taylor.

"Yeah."

"That's fine. Well, let's drink, boys; and then we'll dig up a new outfit for our friend."

AT ABOUT this same time, seated in his little office in the Pay Streak Saloon, Dan Belt perused his last letter from Turkey Track. It read:

> Dan Belt:
>
> The Turkey Track is collecktin. He wants the twenty thousind you got for Jim Hassler's mine and then he's goin to kill you jist like you killed Jim.
>
> Yrs respy
>
> —TURKEY TRACK.

Dan Belt looked grimly at the penciled scrawl. Belt had no morals or conscience; but he did have a yellow streak. He had killed Jim Hassler. What resembled an accidental explosion of dynamite in Hassler's cabin had been caused by Belt after he had stolen a location notice which Hassler planned to record the next day.

Later he had located it through one of his own men and sold it for twenty thousand dollars. And this wild devil of a Turkey Track claimed Jim Hassler was his uncle. That was why Belt kept himself surrounded by his own men, and the roads were guarded. He promised a thousand dollars in gold to the man who got Turkey Track.

Belt was a big, powerful man, handsome in a swarthy way. His eyes were quick to flash with anger.

A peculiar condition existed in Bon-

anza City—a deadline between the mining section and the so-called amusement section. It was a ravine known as the Gut. South of this ravine were the mines and the homes where no dives of any kind were allowed. There Jack Sheedy was the boss. He owned the Rainbow mine, the largest producer, and was head of the Miners' Committee which had delivered the deadline ultimatum to Belt.

The ultimatum contained this paragraph:

> If anything of a violent nature, caused by men, happens to Jack Sheedy or to any other individual of this committee, every person and establishment will be wiped off the North Side of Bonanza City.

Dan Belt knew that this was no idle statement. The mining element outnumbered the gamblers ten to one; and the miners loved Sheedy.

Higrading miners acted as a source of of information for Belt; most of the payrolls came over Belt's bars and green covered tables.

Dan Belt sat back and lighted a fresh cigar. Some one knocked softly on the door; and at Belt's grunting reply the door opened and one of his most trusted men came in.

"There's a young feller out at the bar, Dan," the man said softly. "He's plenty hard lookin', and the boys are close herdin' him. Says he's got a letter to you."

Belt scowled thoughtfully for several moments.

Then he laughed, remembering another letter in his pocket. He glanced at it for a moment.

"Bring him in, Slug," he said.

It was the boy who had worn the chaps of Turkey Track, but now he was wearing an old pair. Belt looked him over keenly.

"You got a letter to me?" he asked.

The boy handed him a dirty envelop. Belt quickly opened it and drew out a blank sheet of paper. He looked at it and held it out to the kid.

"How'd I know what was in it?" asked the kid defiantly.

Dan Belt laughed.

"It's your credentials, Link. So you're a fast gunman, eh? Pretty young, it seems to me."

"I'm old enough to suit me," replied the youngster, as one of the men who had been at Sunrise Pass entered the room.

"I don't like the way you talk, feller," said Belt coldly.

With an almost imperceptible motion of his right arm the kid drew and cocked his heavy Colt, tensing it against his hip. Just a flick of his wrist, and the men in the room were covered.

"I talk my own way," said the kid coldly. "Take it or leave it."

"Wait a minute," said the man from Sunrise Pass. "Dan, this kid killed Turkey Track last night. We brought him out from the old Marsh place and shipped him out to the sheriff."

Dan Belt stared in amazement at the lad.

"You killed Turkey Track?" he gasped. "You?"

"I didn't name him," replied the kid coldly. "All I know is that he tried to throw down on me."

Belt drew a deep breath of thanksgiving.

"Put up that gun, Link," he said. "Slug, fix him up with a room."

After they left, Dan Belt reread that other letter.

> Dear Dan:
>
> I'm sending you a gun-fighting kid named Eddie Link, wanted for a couple killings. No brains, no conscience, and he needs a hideout. His letter of introduction is a blank.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> —J. S.

"Fast as a flash. And he killed Turkey Track," muttered Belt.

Then he went out to the bar and bought drinks for the house. For the first time in weeks Dan Belt was not afraid.

OLD Jimmy McCree, who drove one of Belt's stages, came into the Pay Streak in answer to a summons from Belt, who met him and took the old man back to his office.

"Listen to me, McCree," said Belt bluntly. "Stop Nora from goin' across the Gut."

Jimmy McCree looked blankly at Belt.

"I didn't know—"

"Don't try to prove any alibi, McCree. Keep her on this side."

"I don't see the hurt in her goin' over there, Dan."

"You don't, eh?" snarled Belt. "Where does she go over there?"

"Why, I dunno. I suppose—"

"You suppose, eh? I'll tell you somethin'; she was seen talkin' with Jack Sheedy."

"She's knowed him a long time," said the old man slowly.

"I don't give a damn about that, McCree. I've played fair with you and with her. I've asked her to marry me."

"She told me."

"She did, eh? What else did she say?"

"That she wouldn't do it. She has a will of her own."

"Listen to me, McCree; I've tolerated you and paid you good money. Not because you're a good driver, not because I need you—but because I want that girl. That's flat. You'll either help me out in this or you'll go down the road—alone."

"Alone?"

"Nora stays here."

A hot retort flared in McCree's throat, but he swallowed it. He knew the power of Belt's ruthless organization.

"I'll do me best," he said.

After the old man left the office Belt sent for Eddie Link. The gun-fighting kid sauntered in and Belt snapped at him—

"When I send for a man I expect him to come fast."

"Yeah?" drawled Link. "Keep expectin'." He looked at the other man.

"You're workin' for me, and don't forget that."

Link's laugh nettled Belt.

"Anything funny about it?" he asked.

"I'll tell you, Dan," Link replied easily. "I've always heard that you was a big he-buzzard of a feller, until I got here and heard tell how you lost all your nerve over a feller they called Turkey Track. He's dead now, and your nerve is back. Even when you had about twenty hired killers out watchin' for him you kept out of sight. Yeah, you're a wolf, you are."

"Let me tell you somethin'," snarled Belt. "I'm boss here. You killed Turkey Track and you'll get the reward. But that don't give you any right to cross me."

"I'm not tryin' to cross you, Dan. I'll take your orders, but I'll not take your lip. A man has got to be better than I am to make me take nasty talk. What didja want, anyway?"

"You don't know anybody on the South Side of town, do you?"

"No."

"Do you know who Nora McCree is?"

"I've seen her." Link nodded. "Go ahead."

"Your job is to follow her and see where she goes."

"Foller a girl? What the hell kind of a job is that?"

"You're not here to ask questions, Link."

"She's a mighty pretty girl, Dan."

"She's goin' to be my wife."

The kid looked keenly at Belt for several minutes.

"Yeah?" he drawled.

"What do you mean by that?" snapped Belt. "Don't you believe it?"

"When I see it."

"Listen to me, Link; when I give a man an order I expect him to follow it out. They either do that, or they don't last long in Bonanza City. And I don't stand for my men talkin' back to me."

"That's why," replied the kid.

"Why—what?"

"Why you've got such a danged mangy bunch around you, Belt. Why, I wouldn't trust one of 'em as far as I could stretch your ears."

Belt tried to stifle his anger, to keep his hands off this thin faced youngster who presumed to advise him, who intimated that he was lacking in nerve. And the fellow was laughing at him.

"You better go," said Belt huskily.

"All right. You set down and cool off, Belt. You're too fat to git upset thataway. You might bring on a stroke."

The kid cocked his hat on one side of his head and walked through the saloon. Belt's men looked curiously at him, wondering what sort of assignment Belt had given him. Link knew where Jimmy McCree and Nora lived. The men had told him that Nora was Belt's girl, and the "hands off" order had gone out to the men on that side of the Gut.

On the other side of the street Link met Duke Akers, marshal of Bonanza City. Duke as cold-blooded as a snake, and in the pay of Dan Belt.

"Hyah, Officer," said Link pleasantly.

Duke merely grunted and went across toward the Pay Streak. Link walked down to the stage stable, went through the building, circled around the back and in a few minutes he reached Jimmy McCree's little house. Nora was sweeping the back porch, but stopped to look curiously at Eddie Link.

NORA McCREE was the prettiest girl in Bonanza City —brunette, Irish, with big, serious eyes and a laughing mouth. But she was not laughing as she leaned on the broom and looked at Eddie Link.

"You see," explained Eddie seriously, "I've been hired to spy on you, ma'am; so I thought I'd better start keepin' an eye on you."

"Hired to spy on me?" queried Nora softly. "I don't understand."

"Hired by Dan Belt. You see, as long as he's goin' to marry you, he's goin' to see where you go and what you do."

"Who says I'm going to marry Dan Belt?"

"He does."

"Well!" Nora straightened up, her dark eyes flashing. "Mister Spy, you can go back to Dan Belt and tell him—"

"I can't," interrupted Link. "I'd lose my job."

"Oh, you would, would you? What's that to me?"

"This much," replied Link. "He might hire another man to spy on you, and I wouldn't trust another one of his men."

"Do you think I trust you?" she asked.

"Anyway—" Link grinned—"you'll know who's follerin' you."

"But why should you follow me? This is a free country."

"Well, sir, do you know, I forgot to ask Belt what I was supposed to report. He told me to foller you and tell him where you went. Ma'am, I ain't goin' to do that. Not even if I was sure you was goin' to marry him. But if I don't act like I was spyin' on you, he'll take me off the job and put on some man who *will*."

"What does he expect his spies to see me doing?" she demanded angrily.

"Well," drawled Link, "for one thing he wouldn't expect to see you meetin' Steve Arden across the — across the ravine."

Nora flushed quickly, gripping the broom with both hands.

"You see," continued Link, "Steve is his top-hand gambler, and he'd have Steve killed jist as sure."

Nora stared at Link.

"You knew this?" she whispered. "Who—who told you?"

"I seen you."

"You spied on me last night?"

"No, ma'am. Dan Belt told me to keep away from the South Side; so I went over there. I know Steve, and I'd seen you."

"Dan Belt doesn't know this?" she asked anxiously.

"No. You see, I wasn't his spy until

today."

The girl stared at him dumbly, wonderingly. She had always been afraid of Dan Belt. Steve had told her that Belt would kill him if he knew they loved each other. And this queer sort of spy for Dan Belt knew that she had met Steve Arden.

"I—I don't believe I understand you," she said weakly.

Link laughed softly. He did not blame Dan Belt for coveting this beautiful girl. Link knew Steve Arden—a young, handsome gambler, who had the reputation of dealing a square game, even for Belt.

"You don't love Dan Belt, do you?" he asked.

"No! Why should I love him?"

"I dunno. But you do love Steve Arden."

Nora flushed quickly.

"We'll not discuss that," she replied.

"You see," confided Link, "your father was in Belt's office today. Belt sent for him; and I reckon the talk was about you, 'cause your father looked kinda sick when he came out."

Nora turned away, but not before Link had noticed the misery in her big eyes. He continued:

"I'm kinda new here, but I've figured out things. Belt owns everythin' on wheels and four legs. He knows who comes in and goes out, and if he didn't want anybody to leave town they'd have to walk out, I reckon. Of course, your father could hop his stage at the other end of the line, but you'd still be here."

Nora nodded.

"I'm watched all the time," she said.

"I'm doin' the watchin' for him now," said Link. "'Course, I'm not watchin' the stages for him. But wasn't you and Steve at Jack Sheedy's house night before last?"

Nora looked helplessly at him.

"You know that Dan Belt and Jack Sheedy are bitter enemies, don't you?" she asked.

"Oh, shore."

"Are you going to tell Dan Belt?"

"Nope. You see, I just started on the spying job today."

Nora shook her head, a bit bewildered by this thin faced boy.

"Why do you come and tell me all this?" she asked.

"I jist want you to know where I stand, and to warn you. Belt is no fool. Chances are he's got men watchin' me too. In fact, I don't believe he trusts anybody; so he's prob'ly got a spy to watch every spy he's got. So long—and be careful."

She watched him walk away with the peculiar stiff-legged gait of a man who wears high heeled boots, his elbows bent and held close to his sides.

THE news had reached Bonanza City that the passing of Turkey Track had been confirmed in Wrangle, the county seat, and the body had been buried. Dan Belt, half drunk, was buying drinks for everybody.

Eddie Link went to the saloon, where Belt told him the news.

"You'll get the reward, Link," he said. "Don't worry about it."

"I'm not worryin' about gettin' what's mine," replied Link.

Link wandered about the place for awhile, looking for Steve Arden who was off shift at the time. Finally he went upstairs where Steve had a room above the saloon. Steve was lying on his bed, reading a book, when the young gunman opened the door. The gambler sat up quickly and swung his feet off the bed.

"What do you want?" he asked bluntly.

Link eyed him closely as he closed the door. Downstairs there was much noise. The kid grinned.

"Belt is celebratin'," said Link, ignoring the question.

"I suppose he's got a load off his mind," replied Steve.

"Yaller," said the kid.

"Dan Belt—yellow?"

"Hires guns, don't he?" queried the

kid, scratching his head.

"Does that make him yellow?"

"To my way of thinkin'," replied the kid.

"You ought to tell him that, Link."

"I have."

"Why tell me this?" asked Steve curiously.

"Just to show you what I think of the man who thinks he's boss."

"I'm one of his men," said Steve seriously.

"In a pig's valise, you are!" The kid snorted.

Arden leaned forward, looking intently at the thin faced kid.

"You might explain that remark," said Arden coldly.

"I was over on the South Side night before last," said Link.

Arden had a perfect poker face. He affected a yawn, got slowly to his feet and stepped over to where his coat was hanging on a nail. As he reached into a side pocket Link sprang swiftly in behind him, jamming the muzzle of his gun into Arden's side.

"Easy, pardner," he whispered. "Hand away from that pocket."

And as Arden drew aside, Link explored the pocket and removed a derringer. He put it in his pocket and went back to the chair.

"Set down, Arden," he said. "Me and you are goin' to talk."

Steve Arden sat down, looking anxiously at Link.

"I'm Belt's hired spy," said Link. "He hired me to spy on Miss McCree."

Arden looked grimly at Link, his hands clenched on the blanket.

"Did Belt send you up to see me?" he asked.

"I told you I was hired to spy on Miss McCree. What do you reckon would happen to you if Belt knowed you and her met at Jack Sheedy's house?"

Steve Arden shook his head.

"I can guess."

Link drew the edge of his hand across his throat. Steve turned his head away, his jaw muscles bulging a little.

"Why don'tcha take the girl and git to hell out of here?" asked Link savagely. "Ain't you man enough to shoot your way out?"

"Against two dozen?" asked Steve.

"I would, if she was my girl," said the thin faced kid a bit wistfully. "I'd kill every damn man who got in my road."

"Yes?" queried Arden. "Were you ever in love?"

"Me?" Link laughed and shook his head, but sobered quickly. "At least nobody ever knowed it, if I was. But if I ever was, and a big yallerbelly like Dan Belt tried to bust up my play—well, it wouldn't set so good with me."

"And you're the man Dan Belt trusted as a spy. What would he do if he could hear what you're telling me?"

"Git himself killed, I reckon," drawled Link.

"Dan Belt don't have to do his own killing."

"No; but he'll have to do his own dyin', and he damn well knows it. He'll prob'ly have more nerve now since that Turkey Track person is out of the way. What was the trouble between him and Turkey Track?"

"I never did hear," replied Arden.

"I reckon I'll have to ask Belt."

"The question is—what are you going to tell Belt about me?"

"I wasn't hired to spy on you, Arden."

"Then what are you going to tell him about Nora McCree?"

"I ain't made up my mind yet. But you keep away from the other side of the Gut, Arden. I'm not the only spy workin' for Belt."

Link got to his feet and went to the door. With a flip of his wrist he tossed the derringer to the bed.

"*Adios,*" he said softly and closed the door.

From the balcony he saw Dan Belt and Duke Akers together on the main floor. He slipped down among the crowd, and Belt found him watching a roulette game.

"Want to talk to you," said Belt. Link followed to Belt's office.

"You know who Akers is," said Belt huskily.

He had drunk an unusual amount of liquor, but carried it well.

"Yeah, I know," replied Link indifferently.

"Akers, bein' the marshal, works both sides of the Gut," said Belt. "You know who Steve Arden is, don't you, Link?"

"That handsome gambler?"

"That's Steve."

Belt's eyes hardened and his huge hands gripped the edge of his desk.

"Steve was across to the South Side night before last," he said.

Link's thin lips twisted sarcastically.

"Anythin' criminal about that?" he asked easily.

"Nora McCree was over there, too—same night."

"Yeah?"

"At Jack Sheedy's house!"

Belt spat the words as if they tasted bitter.

"How did you find it out at this stage of the game?" asked Link.

"Akers found it out."

"Somebody squealed, eh?" said Link. "Well?"

"I've got to be sure," said Belt. "And when I'm sure—"

"You'll turn the job over to a hired killer," finished Link. "Well, what can I do about it? Why tell all this stuff to me?"

"Because I want you to watch Arden and the girl. Old Jimmy McCree has always been a friend of Sheedy's, damn him! By heaven, I'll get Arden and Sheedy both."

"I'd let Sheedy alone," advised the lanky marshal. "You can't afford to kill him, Dan—not unless you can figure out a scheme where your skirts will be clean. That bunch over there wouldn't stop at anythin'. Nobody's goin' to squall if you kill Arden. One gambler more or less won't make no difference; but I'd draw the line at Sheedy."

Belt struck his clenched fist on the desktop.

"I'd give five thousand dollars for a scheme to put Sheedy out of the way and keep the North Side out of it."

"That's a lot of money," said Link. "You're such a big man and so damn smart, why don't you figure out one, and save the money?"

Belt glared at Link, who grinned crookedly at him. Duke Akers looked curiously at Link, probably wondering at the nerve of the kid talking like that to Dan Belt.

"You've got your orders, Link," said Belt huskily. "Bring me some news in the mornin'."

"I'll bring you news when I've got some," replied Link, and went out.

"The dirty little snipe!" snorted Duke Akers. "I'd slap his chops if he talked thataway to me, Dan."

"And go to hell on the end of a hot bullet," retorted Belt. "That kid is poison with a gun, Duke. I don't believe he cares who he shoots."

"Well," said the marshal, "he—he ort to make you a good man, Dan."

Belt nodded thoughtfully.

"He'll do—until I don't need him."

DUKE AKERS left the office. A little later, as Belt was coming out, Link came back and met him at the doorway. He looked at Belt good naturedly.

"Was you serious about that five thousand dollars?" asked Link.

"Yeah, why?" grunted Belt.

"Let's go inside and talk about it, Belt."

With the door locked behind them Link leaned across the desk.

"How far would you go, Belt?" he queried seriously.

"The limit," said Belt.

"To git Sheedy and Arden—cold?"

"How?" asked Belt eagerly.

"Suppose Arden killed Sheedy. They—that South Side gang—would lynch Arden, wouldn't they?"

"Too damn quick! But how'd you git Arden to shoot him?"

"Suppose it looked like Arden killed him!"

"That sounds like somethin'," said Belt. "But it couldn't happen on this side of the Gut, Link."

"It would happen right in Sheedy's house. A quarrel over that girl." Link's eyes sparkled with inspiration. "Have that long legged marshal right handy; grab Arden, jerk him over to jail on this side and pass the word over there that he shot Sheedy."

"By gad, I believe it could be worked! There's only one chance for a slip. Suppose Arden was able to convince them that he didn't shoot Sheedy. It might blow back, Link. How can we dispose of Arden?"

"Have him all lynched before the South Side gang git here," replied Link callously.

"Wait a minute," said Belt. "There's too many chances of a slip in that lynchin'. Here's somethin' better. Have some of my men planted here handy. At a signal they run toward the jail, shootin'. We'll say they was called to help the marshal protect his prisoner. But somebody beats us to it and dynamites the jail. Hell, we need a new jail. The South Siders sure can't squawk about us killin' off one of my best men. We'll blame 'em for it and raise hell."

"Well, that might work," admitted Link. "We'll see."

"If you're goin' out, see if you can find Duke Akers and send him in to me."

"You ain't goin' to tell this to that sandhill crane, are you?"

"Why not?" demanded Belt.

"Because a secret ain't a secret when three men know it. We might have to wait quite awhile to pull this deal, Belt, and we don't want too many minds thinkin' it over."

"Are you scared I'll beat you out of that money, Link?"

"Not if I'm alive, you won't, Belt."

"You're a pretty cocky kid, Link."

"I take what's comin' to me, Belt; and when I say I'll do a thing, I do it. Roll that up in a cowhide and smoke it."

Belt laughed at him, and the kid screwed up his face thoughtfully.

"I'm wonderin' if you've got five thousand dollars," he said.

Belt glanced at the heavy safe in the corner of his office.

"Don't let that worry you," he replied. "I could buy your carcass if it was worth its weight in gold, and have money enough left to buy and throw away several more like you."

"I wonder if I'll ever be rich?" mused Link wistfully.

"If all you needed was gall, you'd be a millionaire."

"Well, I've still got some brains." Link grinned. "And you'll pay me for the use of 'em, Belt. *Adios.*"

FOR three days Eddie Link made no report to Dan Belt, except to say that he was strictly on the job. It was late in the afternoon of the fourth day when Link came to Dan Belt. He looked tired and drawn, but triumphant.

"Sheedy met Nora McCreee in the Gut this afternoon," said Link. "I got in close enough to hear what was said. Tonight at eight Arden and the girl meet at Sheedy's house."

"Yeah?" queried Belt. "Steve Arden is on shift at that time."

"He'll have a bad headache," said Link.

"He will, eh? You're damn right he will!"

"Don't be a fool, Belt! Let him off if he asks for it."

"All right. Damn him, I'd like to smash his teeth down his dirty throat! I'll git Duke in here and let him in on it."

"Three of us is enough," said Link. "I'll shoot Sheedy, but you'll have to wipe out Arden, 'cause I won't be here in time. You'll have to git the dynamite and all that stuff and do the

work." He nodded wisely.

"Where'll you be?" asked Belt.

"I'll be lettin' the South Side know what happened, while Duke brings his prisoner across the Gut. We better arrange for Duke to give the signal to touch off the blast as soon as some of 'em show up."

"I wish I could be out of town when this happens," said Belt.

Link looked disgustedly at him.

"Why not?" he said. "Take that seven o'clock stage. He's your driver. Pack up a valise and tell the folks you're goin' away for a few days. Git on the stage, ride out far enough to hide the outfit and come back. Hold the stage there until this is over, and then beat it back to the stage. If there ain't no passengers, it'll be a cinch."

"I can see that there ain't no passengers," said Belt. "That's jist what I'll do. Will you help me with the dynamite? We can run wires over to that old bunkhouse buildin', and I can pull 'em loose before I go back to the stage."

"All right." Link nodded. "We'll send Duke over to watch Sheedy's house. It won't take me long to git over there. I'll go and find Duke so you can tell him what his part is. *Adios.*"

True to Link's prediction, Steve Arden pleaded a headache. It was all Dan Belt could do to keep from exposing his knowledge of what was going on. But he told Arden to take the night off. It would be his last night off. Belt wondered what would be the best way to kill Eddie Link off after this was over. Belt had not the slightest intention of ever paying Link for his scheme or his work. But that could wait; the big scheme came first.

Belt secured the necessary articles, packed them in a big suitcase and announced to the men in the Pay Streak that he was leaving on the night stage. He gave particular orders to each of them, told them he would be back in a week, and made all his preparations for the trip. But before leaving the place he locked his safe and office, putting the keys in his pocket. No one would be allowed in that office during his absence. In the saloon safe was sufficient money to handle the games and the general business. A run of bad luck was unknown to Belt's games; they were not run that way.

NIGHT comes swiftly after sundown in the desert hills. Eddie Link stood in the lights from the stage depot and watched Dan Belt climb into the stage. Several people were grouped around to see him depart—a perfect alibi for the boss of Bonanza City.

Tug Adams was the stage driver, and Link had heard that Adams had no more conscience than a rattlesnake.

Duke Akers came along and shook hands. Belt bade Akers to take good care of the town during his absence. After Akers left the stage he strolled toward the deadline canyon.

Eddie Link watched the stage leave town, then crossed the street. He stopped at the mouth of a narrow alley between the Pay Streak Saloon and a feed store. He remained near the corner for several minutes, standing in the deep shadows until he felt sure he was not observed, then faded silently into the alley.

Business was brisk at the Pay Streak. Many of the miners from the mines across the deadline were there, and all the games were running. Several of Belt's gunmen were drinking and playing. With the big boss out of the way, they were at liberty to enjoy themselves.

Link came in later, but Belt's men ignored him. He did not drink or gamble. Link looked at the clock on the back bar, noted the time and strolled away. He decided that Belt should be well on his way back to jail by this time; so Link went to meet him.

Link was at the little jail when Belt

joined him, and they planted the dynamite. Working as swiftly as possible in the dark, they ran the wires over to the old adobe shack and hooked them to a battery.

Link was obliged to fasten the wires, because Belt was too nervous.

"All right," growled Belt. "I'll handle this now. You get over and finish the rest of the job. You better be damn sure you do it right, or I'll—"

Dan Belt never finished his threat. Something hit him a terrific blow on the head.

A few minutes later Eddie Link again crossed the main street and entered that same alley. He did not come back to the main street; but a little later he was circling the rear of the buildings and hurrying toward the deadline canyon. It was nearly time for his rendezvous with the lanky marshal of Bonanza City.

Fifteen minutes later the residents of the South Side heard the sound of a single shot. Just one shot—no more. Those on the other side of the deadline were too far away to hear it; or if they did hear it they paid no attention.

It was possibly twenty or thirty minutes later when six shots rang out on the night air, plainly heard by the folk of the North Side. People on the street wondered what was the meaning of them.

"Sounded up near the jail," said a man in front of the Pay Streak. "Mebbe Duke's havin' trouble. We better go and see."

As he finished a sheet of flame illuminated the sky and a deafening explosion followed, fairly shaking that side of town.

Men ran into the street, wondering, questioning. A bareheaded man came running down the street, waving his arms frantically.

"They blowed up the jail!" he yelled. "Blowed her up and knocked me down!"

"Who blowed up the jail?" asked a dozen voices.

"I—I never stopped to ask," replied the dazed man, and the crowd ran to find out for themselves.

Down at the concealed stage Tug Adams hunched on the seat, waiting for Dan Belt to return. Belt had told him nothing, except that he would be back in a little while. Tug heard the explosion and wondered what caused it.

There was a chilly wind blowing; so Tug got down and walked around to keep warm. The team was tied in a manzanita thicket, some distance off the road. Tug circled the stage once; and as he came around the second time a figure stepped out from beside the boot at the rear of the stage, slashed downward with a gun barrel, and Tug Adams went to sleep.

"All right, Steve," called the voice of Eddie Link. "You and Nora pile right in and we'll ge goin'. We won't stop at Sunrise; so go to sleep, if you want to."

"We owe you a lot, Eddie," said Steve, as he helped Nora into the stage. "What was the explosion about?"

"That wasn't no explosion. That was a receipt," replied Eddie.

The door of the stage slammed shut. The thin faced kid swung the four horses deftly around, and the heavy stage went rocking down toward the road.

LONG after midnight the Pay Streak was packed with men from both sides of the Gut. With Jack Sheedy as spokesman, the Miners' Committee was making an investigation. Dan Belt would have greatly resented Jack Sheedy and his men conducting an investigation on that side of town, and especially in the Pay Streak. But Dan Belt was not there to object. Dan Belt had gone away on the stage that evening. Several people were ready to testify to that. But Dan Belt's white Stetson sombrero, torn and powder-burnt, had been found near the ruins of the jail. Someone had been blown to bits in that explosion, but no one knew who it might have been.

Steve Arden and Eddie Link were

both missing. Arden's personal belongings were all gone from his room. Jack Sheedy faced the crowd.

"Here's all we know about it, gents," he said. "About eight o'clock this evenin' a shot was fired outside my home. We investigated and found Duke Akers, the marshal, lying across my front porch. In his right hand was a cocked gun, all six chambers loaded. He had not fired the shot. And—" Sheedy drew a deep breath—"he never will fire another shot. What he was doing there will probably never be known. Shortly after we discovered him, and while our doctor was making an examination, we heard shots fired over here."

"Six of 'em," interrupted a man. "I counted 'em."

"Six!" affirmed another. "I did too."

"The number doesn't matter." Sheedy smiled. "Immediately after the shots we heard the explosion which blew up our jail. Why the jail was dynamited we do not know. Tug Adams, the stage driver, came back to town, bleeding from a head wound and telling a queer tale of holding the stage out there a mile or so while Dan Belt came back to see some one. He says he was struck over the head totally unexpected and his stage stolen.

"So much for that part of it. Some of you boys saw our investigation of Belt's office, where we found the safe open. How much money was taken we do not know. You all heard me read the letter we found in Belt's desk—a letter from an outlaw called Turkey Track, who was killed a few days ago near Sunrise. He accuses Belt of murdering Jim Hassler and stealing a prospect, which he sold for twenty thousand dollars."

"What about that paper on his desk?" queried a miner. "The one with the Turkey Track mark on it?"

"Some one trying to impersonate a dead outlaw," replied Sheedy. "The Turkey Track was buried in Wrangler the other day. He was identified and the reward is to be paid promptly, I understand."

"The thing to do," said a miner, "is to find Steve Arden and that hatchet faced Eddie Link. It's a cinch that Dan Belt never hit Tug Adams and stole his own stage. Steve was Dan's top-hand dealer, but I don't know what Link was."

Two men came in, shoving their way through the crowd to where Sheedy and his men were standing. They were carrying an exploding battery for firing dynamite blasts, which they placed on the bar.

"We found the busted wires," explained one of the men, "and traced 'em to that old shack west of the jail, where we found the battery. Look what's on the handle!"

Tied to the handle of the battery was a piece of white cardboard, on which was penciled the mark of the Turkey Track; and attached to the string were two big keys.

"That's the key to the jail!" asserted one of Belt's men. "That biggest one. I've seen Duke Akers foolin' with it lots o' times."

"And that other one is Belt's safe key," declared the bartender. "I know that one well. Somebody jimmied Dan's window—the one on the alley—and opened the safe with Dan's own key!"

"But how in the devil did he get Dan's key?" queried a gambler.

"That's right," nodded the bartender. "Dan was careful of that key. Why, he never left it out of his pocket for a minute."

"And there was Dan's new white hat," added another. "There ain't another hat like that in this country. Dan paid fifty dollars for that hat. And it's a cinch it was in that explosion."

"Well," said the bartender wisely," "there's Dan Belt, Steve Arden and that rat faced kid to be accounted for. And somebody was in the jail when that dynamite busted."

Jack Sheedy drew out a soiled letter and looked at it again. It read:

Dan Belt:
The Turkey Track is collecktin. He wants the twenty thousind you got for Jim Hassler's mine and then he's goin to kill you jist like you killed Jim.

Yrs respy
—TURKEY TRACK.

Jack Sheedy drew a deep breath and pocketed the letter.

"I move that we drop this investigation until we hear from Dan Belt," he said.

"Seconded," said one of the committee.

And the investigation was closed.

YELLOW BOWDEN

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Author of "In The Tradition"

THE *Marathon* was going down; there was no doubt. An hour before, plunging through the chaos of a dying hurricane, she had dropped her propeller, taken a broken tailshaft through her hull, swung into the trough and been all but submerged in a welter of angry water. No. 1 and No. 2 hatches caved in, and the sea poured below. She was listing a little, and down by the head, while the wind whipped the spray about her and a pale moon showed her at intervals through the drive of the storm wrack.

Captain Bowden—Yellow Bowden—clung to the forward rail of the navigation bridge, his stomach turning over inside him and the icy sweat heavy on his face.

"She ought to last a bit longer," the mate was saying in his ear. "And the sea's going down. We'll get the boats away."

"Yes," said the captain. "That's right. That's right."

"Tough luck," said the mate. "Right after losing the *Manlua* too."

"Yes," said the captain. "Tough luck."

The mate went away, bent to the wind and spray. He found the second mate in the chartroom making up bundles of instruments, signal flares and the chronometers.

"He's cracking again," he said. "Hanging on the rail and shaking all over."

The second mate spat out a fragment of smoldering cigaret.

"What else did you expect? He hasn't the guts of a louse. If he'd had any decency he'd have quit the sea after the *Manlua* affair. And if his brother didn't own half the stock in the line he'd have been fired anyway."

"Sure. Still, it's tough, losing two ships, one right after the other."

Captain Bowden was thinking the

same. Yellow Bowden! He knew what they called him all through the line. He clung to the rail and stared ahead at the shadows of the swells under the wan moon. The iron spray stung his face. One hundred and forty passengers and ninety crew. Half the boats gone already; six feet of gaining water below; and the *Marathon* in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean.

"We're drawing fires," the fourth engineer was reporting. "The dynamos'll soon stop."

"All right. I'll have the mate rig lanterns."

"I've told the mate."

The captain made no answer to that, and the engineer went away, passing the wireless operator at the head of the companion.

"I've got the *Seramis,*" reported the operator. "And the *Tonkin,* sir. They figure they both ought to be here about dawn."

The captain nodded. He went to the chartroom. The mate was still talking with the second.

"Two ships coming," the captain informed him. "The *Seramis* and the *Tonkin.*"

The mate nodded.

"I know," he said, and bluntly turned his back.

Captain Bowden hesitated bleakly for a moment, and went out on the bridge again and to his place at the rail.

THE first time Bowden met fear was when he was apprentice on the fullrigger *Marsdale,* just two days at sea. A man fell from the maintopgallant yard and screamed as he fell. Young Bowden was turned to an icy, quaking thing, his stomach sick and sweat on his face. He fainted when he viewed the reddening huddle on the deck. He never ascended the ratlines again without shaking in every limb; and the terror of death watered his very marrow.

After that first voyage he would have quit the sea, but he had no choice. His father had been a shipmaster; so had his uncle. His elder brother had followed deep-water and had founded his own line. All the traditions of generations of seafarers stood against him. One point only he won. He was transferred to steam.

Then one day off the coast of China in the roaring typhoon a wall of water came over the rail and caught him, smashing him on a hatch, half-drowning him and leaving him all but unconscious. His mates swore and took it, plunging back to the work of securing a deck cargo of case oil. But Bowden staggered to his room, and nothing could move him. He stayed there until it was over. And his shipmates called him yellow, and Yellow Bowden he became.

The agony of that came back as he held to the *Marathon's* rail. He wiped the iron spray from his face. Time had brought him a certain cunning. Pride had aided him. But nothing could check his mad, blind panic in a crisis.

There was that time fighting fire in the main hold, off the coast of Malabar. He dropped his hose and ran after a small explosion knocked him off his feet. He was not injured, but he scrambled back on deck, leaving an officer unconscious and two scorched seamen to fight back the flames.

And then there was that time, when he had become a mate, and it was a question of taking the survivors off the *Miltiades,* going down fast in the Indian Ocean in a mad gale. He gave one look at the giant, smoking seas and refused. He was afraid. The second mate went off with seven volunteers, and the crew looked at Yellow Bowden, quietly, without a word.

Yet he prospered. That was certain, with his brother's position in the line. He had gone up; second mate; mate; master at last—and a by-word.

Bowden thought, it was true, that once he became master trouble would fade. A master does not have to plunge into dangers. He could always cover the small, slow fears. But it was the great

crisis that betrayed him. As on the *Manlua*. Everything might in time have been forgiven him; but not the *Manlua*.

It was just such a night as this in which the *Marathon* was going down. Wind and sea. Darkness, and without even a moon. The *Manlua* had gone down fast, so fast there was hardly time to get the boats away. Only one, in fact, got away. In that one boat was Captain Bowden. Eight men of the *Manlua's* crew died upon the deck.

Bowden remembered going utterly, stark mad with terror; fighting at the rail; clawing men aside. Only the conflicting evidence, due to the pitch darkness, saved him at the inquiry.

Sane again and safe, Bowden could not tell the truth even to his elder brother, and so he had been given the *Marathon* and sent to sea again. And why he had taken her remained as much a mystery to him as why he had remained at sea. He was like a drunken man who insists upon staggering to his own doom.

BOWDEN steadied himself as the *Marathon* rolled sickeningly. A spasm of fear seized him, and then contempt and then self-pity. He was *yellow*.

He had no respect for himself. But the Fates hounded him. He had lost the *Manlua* and whatever vestige of pride or honor that might have remained. And now the *Marathon*. One chance in a thousand, and the Fates picked him.

"We'll have to get the boats away soon," the mate was saying.

The mate only addressed him perfunctorily, as a matter of routine. Whatever Bowden thought or said did not matter to any one.

"The passengers are acting well," said the mate. "No panic. I've got them all properly assigned. Do you want to check things?"

"No. No, it's all right. You can direct."

"You're staying here?"

"Yes, I'm staying here."

The mate went away. The second mate was already gone, and the captain was left alone on the listing bridge. He flinched as a sea foamed across the foredeck. It wouldn't be long now. Half an hour perhaps. Then she would slip under, or maybe roll over.

It cost Bowden a tremendous effort to remain where he was, but he could manage it for awhile. Until the last lurch came, and then he knew he would go utterly mad.

It would not be as it had been on the *Manlua*, though. They would get away all the boats they needed on the *Marathon*. There was time, and the sea was going down. The rescue ships would come up with the dawn. No man could blame Bowden for saving himself now.

No; that was clear. And why should a master die with his ship? There was a tradition, of course. A captain always remained. Where was the master of the *Titanic*, of the *Vestris*, of the *Alaska*?

But in those wrecks there had been too few boats, not enough room. There were others. Collins of the *Maravale* who stood on the bridge and cried with his ship a flaming hell beneath him. Brockley of the *Asia City*, grinding on the reefs, refusing to climb into the breeches-buoys though every soul was safe and ashore. Ashland of the *Pekin Lady*, foundered in midocean and in a calm, who locked himself in his cabin when the last boat cleared. It was the tradition. You brought your ship home or you went down with her. Men he knew had done this, men, who in their time, had refused to drink with him.

Yet they could say nothing now if he saved himself. Not every captain was expected to seek the honor of being a martyr. And there was no blame in the losing of the *Marathon*. It was just one of those chances of the sea. But his record. . . He laughed. Yes, his record. They would say, and justly, that it was only Yellow Bowden making sure of life again.

He took his hands from the rail and moved uncertainly toward the companion to the lower bridge. He went down the companion, stopped a moment to view the nightmare of the wet decks, lighted by many hurricane lamps and some flares, the boats dropping into the sea, the passengers quiet and remarkably orderly. The mate was a good man. He had handled things well.

"Don't worry," the mate was saying to some one on the main deck. "He'll come fast enough when it's the last boat."

"So long as he waits until then it'll be all right," said another voice. "But if he acts like he did on the *Manlua* before this mob's overside we'll have a panic on our hands."

Captain Bowden groped into his room and sat down. He had to make several attempts at lighting a match because his hands were shaking. The match flamed. Opening a drawer in his desk, Bowden secured what he wanted.

Then Bowden went back on the bridge.

THE mate came on the bridge for the last time.

"You'd better acome along, sir," he said evenly. "We're ready to push off."

"Every one get away?" asked the captain.

"Every one, sir. The last boat's waiting."

"I," stammered the captain, "I will stay here."

The mate was silent. He could see that the other man was sagging at the rail, literally sagging, his legs flaccid beneath him, and there was no mistaking the stark fear in his voice.

"But there's no need of that, sir," the mate said. "There's plenty of room. No use staying with her any longer. She'll go down any minute."

He looked sharply at the captain. This wasn't Yellow Bowden at all. Yellow Bowden should have been in that last boat almost before she touched the water. And Bowden was saying—

"You might take this and throw it away."

"Take this?"

The mate mechanically took a small object from the captain's hand. He was struck. He was nonplused.

"Come on, sir," he said. "Let me give you a hand. Are you sick?"

"Will you get out!" the captain shouted suddenly. "Get to hell out of here! I'm going down with her. Get out!"

"Listen to me, sir!"

"Get out!"

A flicker of moonlight danced over the deck as the *Marathon* gave an ominous lurch. Captain Bowden staggered a little, and there was a clinking sound of metal. And then the mate saw—saw even as he turned to run, knowing it was too late to do anything more. He dropped down to the maindeck, over the rail and into the waiting boat.

Slowly and steadily the *Marathon* slid forward and down. The sea climbed over the foredeck, covered it; rose steadily up the saloon house to the lower bridge, then to the navigation bridge. And above the wind and the sea noise sounded the mad screaming of Captain Bowden, the screaming of a man utterly lost in raw fear.

In the moonlight the watchers could see one wildly uptossed arm, a struggling, straining torso. Scream followed scream until the water slid over and with a final roll the *Marathon* went utterly from view. There was a long quiet, with only the whine of the wind, the slap of spray against the boat's side. And then the mate released his long held breath.

"He knew he was going to crack!"

The fourth mate leaned forward.

"What is it? What's that you got there, sir?"

The mate opened his hand and showed the small object the captain had given him as they parted.

"This?" he said. "This? Look at it, man! He ironed himself to the rail and gave me the key!"

Blazing Cane

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

FIRE! The message telephoned from a cane field watch tower in the Dominican Republic sends the white *cultivos* running to where their saddled horses stand tethered, and hundreds of black laborers swarming from their white washed *barracoons*, for fire spells immense loss to the great Centrals employing them. Should the burned cane be cut and milled within a few days after such a catastrophe, it will sour and be ruined. And labor is not plentiful in this republic which, though larger than either Holland or Belgium, possesses less than a million population.

Every precaution is taken against cane field fires, smoking in the cane being severely punished. The lighting of incendiary fires often spells death for those caught in the act by the Dominican soldiery known as *mata-perros*—dog-killers—particularly if the perpetrator is one of the despised Haitians, who furnish the greater portion of plant-taion labor.

Everywhere the deadly *machete*, equally adaptable to agriculture or homicide, is seen. It dangles from the saddles of the *cultivos*, who are in charge of large districts, from the saddles of the major domos, who serve as foremen, and from the belts of the cane cutters. It is a terrible weapon even when used as a whip, and it takes an expert to administer a *machete* without inflicting a wound.

One morning as I rode with a Danish division superintendent we came upon a Haitian who was lighting his pipe. The Dane was off his horse in an instant, his *machete* flashing in his hand. Down he swooped on the black man, who was too frightened to draw his own weapon. Up and down went the Dane's blade.

The sound was like that of old rags being beaten, and the Haitian screamed in agony. At first he grovelled, then took to flight with the inexorable Dane behind him. The Dane never missed a stroke with the flat of his blade, and continued the punishment until the Haitian lay senseless on the ground.

Cruel and bestial as was the affair, it is the custom. And the Haitians do not seem to resent it, for the livelihood of all depends on the cane crop. This particular Haitian, though so terribly beaten, was at work the next day.

Since American intervention the Domican government has enforced the laws against firearms most severely, and but few unlicensed revolvers are seen. Three years is the penalty often meted out for illicit possession, but the *machete* as an implement of agriculture may be carried anywhere except in the towns.

Knife carrying brings only a three months penalty, and many are carried in the Republic. For this reason coats are worn by the *cultivos* and major domos even in hot weather. They feel the need of protection when off their horses. Indeed, these men seldom dismount in the fields unless forced to, as their *machetes* are lashed to their saddles.

The burning of *baljobo*—cane refuse—after a field has been harvested is an impressive sight. It is always done at night and is supervised by a *cultivo* who directs fifteen or twenty men comprising his fire guard. Great tanks of water are conveniently placed, and then a match is applied. The smoke arising is black and dense, and the red flames must be constantly watched for fear of their spreading to uncut fields.

It is the *cultivo's* job to keep close to the fire. The white man must set an example to the blacks.

By JAMES STEVENS

Tang of timber and salt of the sea—the wild old Northwest waterfront . . .

CAP'N DAMNABLE

IT IS half history and half legend, this story of the fray between Cap'n Damnable and John Pennell. The history is in the frontier conflict between the builder and the despoiler, the tamer of the wilderness and the ravager. The legend is in the Homeric stature attained at the hands of two generations of North Pacific bards.

You know—there were giants in the earth in those days. It may have been so. Anyhow, my own way is to follow the pattern of the bunkhouse yarn-spinners . . .

The thunder of wind in the big timber; the salty smell of tidewater in blowing rain; the camp-fire glow on the mackinawed shoulders of rugged men; the boom of a chesty voice in a tale of the old days, the great days, the heroic times when giants tramped the wild earth of the shores of Puget Sound . . .

The polished horns of twenty oxen—bulls, to the Puget Sound loggers—gleamed whitely through the rain-washed woods. A storm threatened in the wind from the northwest. It packed the twilight clouds on the horizon of tidewater and growled ominously in the shore timber. The great boughs gathered rain, then heaved it down in chill cascades when the wind surged. Mud was making in the four-foot gaps between the cross-logs of the skidroad. The bulls were sullen and fractious as they labored in the last trip of the day to the landing.

There a steam tug, the propeller *Noah*, was completing a raft from the big timbers that floated in the booming grounds. The skipper was in the stern, at the fairlead, his bellowing voice lifting in profane orders to the man at the wheel and salty oaths at a pair of laggard loggers on the raft.

This bull of a man was the hellion of the Sound—Cap'n Damnable to the tidewater loggers. He was already a man with a saga about his name. It said that the *Noah* was a Boston tug, that Cap'n Damnable had pirated the craft there when a Federal marshal was aboard and in possession. The captain and his crew ran the tug to sea. Put-

ting in at St. Thomas, they loaded coal and provisions, left the still dazed marshal on the wharf and vanished on a course for the Horn. Eventually the *Noah* found refuge and a new life in the tidewater wilderness of Puget Sound. Here, despite his piratical past and his violence, the possessor and captain of the Boston tug had achieved a reputation for manly honesty and fair dealing.

But the captain was a hard man—hard to all but Laughing Bill Gallard, the young giant of a woodsman, the bullpuncher in the Hared logging camp. The two were as different as day and night—yet they had been united in friendship.

That, however, was done for. Laughing Bill did not know it yet, as he left his bull-team to the swamper and swung over the rafted logs to the *Noah*. But the end was plain to the captain.

A woman. A weak woman. A bad one, as the term went on the Sound. The like is ever a reef in the course of friendship between men.

Bill Gallard lurched up from a butt log and leaped the stern rail. He was a great swaggering figure of youth, in a blazing mackinaw, stagged breeches and calked boots. His huge red face shone in a grin through swirling lines of rain. His blue eyes sparkled with laughter, which always broke forth at the slightest hint of humor.

Cap'n Damnable, in oilskins, stood like a black stump. He was clamping all feeling down in himself, for what he had to say needed the clearest speech. His eyes were like two knots in their unwinking stare at the big lad.

"We'll go to my cabin," he said.

"Yay-hey!" Bill Gallard laughed, as he would laugh over nothing at all. "Cap'n, I smell a keg of nails—just around the Horn from Boston, I'll bet."

The captain said heavily—

"Boston and rum be damned."

Bill Gallard laughed. It was like a tree laughing, a tree rocking on its roots, opening its boughs wide and lifting ringing shouts from the deeps of its bole. Yay-hey-hey! Down on the logs the raftsmen straightened to listen, swabbed the rain from their necks and grinned knowingly at one another. Up the skidroad Gallard's ringing roar echoed in the wake of the plodding bulls. They shook their heads and waggled their ears. The swamper, hunched against the drive of the rain, chuckled in his mackinaw collar.

Yay-hey-hey! It sure was a treat to hear Laughing Bill bust loose.

"We'll have better than rum, Cap'n," said the woodsman, his laugh chuckling out. "I've a wedding to tell you about."

"We'll go to my cabin," the captain repeated.

Some dark force in his tone and look quieted Laughing Bill. The two moved up the deck. The cabin door slammed. There was no more laughter.

A SUDDEN uproar of battle broke from the cabin. The mate of the *Noah* heard it above the rasp of the towline through the fairlead. He stared with bulging eyes at the after door as it thudded and shook. The man up at the wheel was frozen by an ominous thunder of wrathful voices and prodigious blows underfoot. Carpy Doak, the boom boss, aboard to get the captain's receipt for the logs, peered with ardent curiosity through a misted port.

In a smoky glow of lamplight he caught fragmentary glimpses of the fight between the two friends. The fight was all from one side. Young Bill Gallard was making it. His blue eyes glared insanely when he faced the lamp above the captain's table. Heaving and swaying, he threw his fists in wild, overhanded swings, like an axman chopping a tree. Cap'n Damnable only warded off the blows, until one struck his cheek. It staggered him against his bunk. He sank into a deep crouch, then lunged under another frenzied swing. With a quickness astounding for his bulk, the captain straightened at Gallard's back, seized his mackinaw collar, jerked it up-

ward, then down over the woodsman's arms.

Gallard was whipped around like a stick in an eddy. Cap'n Damnable held the front of his mackinaw in an iron grip, pinning his arms. As they stood now, the lamplight struck the faces of both men. Bill Gallard's was contorted in helpless rage. Cap'n Damnable's was bruised and blood-streaked, and now his black eyes blazed with wrath. The boom boss caught the roar of his bull's voice.

"Now you'll hearken, ye hell-blown timber beast—ye condemned stumphead!" roared the captain. "You'll not ruin yourself with that she-scut of a Lily Neal. I've the truth of her from an honest man. She's no orphan who has to perform in Pennell's dancehall because she has no support otherwise. She was run out of the Barbary Coast, too wicked for even that alley of hell, like Pennell himself. An old stager of sin, she is. She'd rob you and ruin you, naught else. Do to me as you will, but have the truth from Lily afore you marry her."

The big lad's fury had ebbed, but his eyes were cold with hate.

"I'll do as I please," his voice rasped. "Anyhow, Lily is no common dancehall girl. She's an artist."

"So she says," growled the captain. "There are honest girls in the dancehalls, but Lily Neal is not one of them."

"You lie—"

"Damn you, get off my boat!" the captain thundered. "I'll be a fool-killer to you yet! You dog salmon of a man! You—"

The cabin roared again. The door crashed open. Bill Gallard heaved out on the stern deck, stumbling to his knees. He got up heavily, and without a backward look he swung overside and drove across the logs for the landing.

Carpy Doak followed him. The boom boss was a man who took care of himself, and this policy led him to shun Cap'n Damnable for the time being. But Carpy Doak also suffered the itch of a he-gossip. As rainy twilight thickened over the Sound the story of the row in the cabin was on the grapevine, following Bill Gallard to the logging camp.

STORMY darkness, and the log tow was under way. With the course laid out and the mate left in charge, the captain of the *Noah* had shut himself in his cabin. He sat on his bunk and considered his failure with his friend, young Bill Gallard. His great fault, the violence in his blood, had betrayed him again.

The smoky lamp shook from the beat of the tug's engine. Rain drummed the ports in surges of wind. It would be such a night on wild tidewater as Cap'n Damnable generally welcomed with joyous profanity. But his temper did not lift to it now.

He was himself for the time, Captain Nat Barbold of Boston, master in steam and sail, a man of highest promise in his trade. And it had all come to this, to this end in the farthest outpost of the frontier. And here, even here, his one friendship was wrecked, and he had set his hand to a course of action that was fairly certain to end in disaster. A black devil haunted Nat Barbold.

Violence. The word hammered up in the iron beat of the engine. His pulse leaped at the mere thought of the word. It was, he realized, the essence of his character. Nat Barbold was a violent man. Not in spirit, in purpose, but in every instinctive urge of his blood.

He had killed a man on his first whaling cruise. Self-defence, thrust and slash with his harpoon against the menace of another, but the end was the stain of violent death on his hands. So it had gone on with his service in the clippers. Occasion was ever making a bully to tame, a mutiny to subdue. He had hope for a refuge of peace in the ownership of a tug. But a banker tricked him in the deal, clapping a Federal lien on the *Noah*. Then, in

a storm of wrath, piracy, the taking of his boat by force, escape around the Horn. And now the clash with his best friend.

But the friendship had been finished anyhow, he bleakly reflected. The like of Lily Neal would make enemies of brothers. Well, the damage was done. With the price paid, Nat Barbold was resolved to have a substantial return for it.

The queen of Pennell's dancehall should quit Seattle, and without Bill Gallard. And that would mean a finish fight with Pennell himself.

Barbold's fists itched for action. He stood up, moved restlessly about the narrow cabin for a moment, then tramped to the after door. It blew open as he pulled the latch. The captain stared out at the riding lights of the log raft. By their lift and dip he saw that the whitecaps were running dangerously high.

The tidewater frontiersman gazed on through the wind and black weather at the indistinct shore. The timber roared there with surging thunder. It was still wilderness, free and clean. And so were its men unspoiled. Men like young Bill Gallard. Men great in labor and lusty in laughter. Trail-tamers. Builders from wild earth.

Nat Barbold's heart was with them. And his heart was against the human evil in the clean, green land, the John Pennells and Lily Neals. An urgent force was making in Barbold. It was a crusading spirit and it smothered this personal affair of Bill Gallard, Lily Neal and himself. It even rose above John Pennell. It was the force of the eternal struggle between human aspiration and the temptations of the flesh.

So the Boston sailor, still a Puritan despite his sins, was caught in the grip of a crusader's mission. For Nat Barbold there was only one way to carry it on—the way of violence.

With an oath, Barbold sealed his resolution. He then shut the cabin door, leaving Nat Barbold stowed inside. Cap'n Damnable mounted to the wheelhouse. He changed the course to follow the shoreline. The wind was heaving into a gale. It was a two-hour run to Seattle. There was an increasing chance of the tug and the raft being driven into a cove for shelter from the blow.

THROUGH wet and windy shadows Bill Gallard was heading down the corduroy road from Hared's logging camp to Seattle. His shoulders were hunched under the weight of a blanket-roll. After the fight with Cap'n Damnable he had quit his job. His angry purpose was to leave the Sound country for good, with Lily Neal. They should go to San Francisco on the *Mary Dunstan,* as they had planned. But there would be no coming back.

It was not the first time that young Gallard had heard the call of such a romantic adventure. Fortunes were to be had for the finding in California, that glamorous land of gold. The best a man could hope for on the Sound was a wage for hard labor, or a patch of raw earth after years of Herculean clearing. Gallard owned timberland, left him by his father. With his savings, he could make a home. Cap'n Damnable had held him to that purpose. Lily Neal had promised to quit the dancehall and help him loyally.

"But first," was her sole condition, "we'll have a month in San Francisco. That's little enough to ask, Laughing Bill."

The young sapling of a woodsman had agreed. Wrath welled in him now at the memory of the captain's accusations against Lily. That she would rob him and leave him to ruin in California —it was a foul lie. And the story was in camp, for the loggers to grin and leer over. Well, let them. Tomorrow he'd sell his land to John Pennell. At nightfall, sailing out on the *Mary Dunstan* with Lily Neal . . .

In the curve of the road above an inlet Gallard's gaze was caught by dots

of light in the stormy blackness of the Sound. By the gaps between them they could belong only to a tug and a log tow. It was plain that Cap'n Damnable was running his raft into the shelter of the inlet.

Bill Gallard heaved a gusty sigh of relief as he hastened on. He feared no further interference from Cap'n Damnable. Holding shelter till the storm blew out, the *Noah* would not make Seattle with the raft until morning, at best. There was an excellent chance for him to quit Seattle without having to face Cap'n Damnable again.

JOHN PENNELL'S Illahee roared with raw life. This week four ships were loading lumber at the Seattle wharves, and money was loose on the waterfront. Coal-miners and bull-team loggers, sailors and stevedores, single settlers who had come down corduroy trails by chik-chik wagon for Saturday trade, sawdust savages from Port Orchard, Port Gamble and Yesler's Mill, salmon fishermen and tidewater buckos—all headed for Illahee, the one dancehall in the Sound country.

The boom was on in Seattle. A thousand miles of wild coast from Puget Sound to the Golden Gate. Vancouver and Victoria to the North remained plain posts of the fur trade. Uncle Sam was the boss of the Sound. Baranoff was out of Alaska, his castle under the stars and stripes. So Seattle was doing fine, thank you kindly. There'd be a railroad soon. Here's the coming country. Settle down, stranger, settle down. Rich land for the asking, jobs all over, and when you want a blow-in Frisco has no spot to beat Pennell's Illahee.

So the Seattle spirit surged in its rugged infancy. The town never missed a chance. John Pennell was more than tolerated. No common merchant of vice, he appeared always as an ornamental figure in plug hat, silk stock, boiled shirt, diamond studs and flowered vest. He smoked cigars. He was a gentleman in manners and speech. He was feared, for he had a lightning hand in a pistol duel, and in common brawls there was thunder in his fists.

His Illahee brought trade to Seattle. So in the main the Seattle traders supported Pennell. They were more than willing for Illahee to match the rank growth of San Francisco's Sydney Town into the Barbary Coast.

But John Pennell himself had grander dreams. Having come to Seattle a fugitive, he hoped to depart a king. He saw the rising empire. He might become another Baranoff.

The first play in the grand game was on. The Gallard section, a key holding for the coming railroad, was the prize. Lily Neal was dealing the play for Pennell with a skilled hand. Once she got that great gump of a Gallard down in San Francisco, safe in a Barbary Coast hideout, she'd soon have him ready to sell out for a song.

There was only one hitch. The *Mohican*, a Boston brig, was in port for a cargo of lumber. The brig's master, one Dick Furniss, had chanced to know Lily too well in the days when the Barbary Coast was yet Sydney Town. If Furniss should talk too much . . .

Pennell, from his post at the upper end of the bar, followed the figures of the queen of Illahee and the master of the *Mohican* with the watchful gaze of a lynx. Lily seemed to be snaring the man. They whirled in the maze of a square dance.

The scene was a riot of raw color. Oil lamps swinging from the ceiling beams shed a yellow glow over the motley frontier crowd that packed the floor. Thick tumblers shone, and liquor sparkled in the hands of a gaping line at the bar. The music banged and screeched from a tinpot piano, a fiddle and an accordion on a box of a stage.

The three-inch planks of the floor thudded and quaked under the stamp of spiked boots. Vivid mackinaw checks shone amid the flaring hues of Spanish shawls on the shoulders of the

dancehall girls from San Francisco, mostly Chilean. Copper-skinned charmers flaunted blazing blanket patterns and a glitter of beads. Here and there swarthy sailors flashed white teeth and jingled gold earrings above red neckerchiefs.

As the music crashed to a close Lily Neal and Captain Furniss linked arms and sashayed to the bar. Furniss bent his shaggy head toward Lily's laughing chatter and grinned through his black beard. He was plainly in a mellow mood.

John Pennell smiled. Then his lynx eyes, always restlessly watchful, darted about the big hall. Their gaze was caught sharply by the giant figure of a man in the wall shadows near the entrance. Pennell leaned over the bar and whispered swiftly to Lily Neal.

"Young Gallard," he said, "is here."

STILL two hours from Seattle, the *Noah* was pounding ponderously into the wind, bullying through the whitecaps. The neck of Dugger's Cove blackened out in the tug's wake. In the shelter of the cove's steep northwest shore the rafts, with all but three logs salvaged from a breakup, were moored.

Cap'n Damnable stood down in the darkness of the stern deck, staring into the blowing rain. He was again Nat Barbold, seeing the destiny that had inexorably tracked him from crisis to crisis of his life. That fate would drive him on, and follow again. It was a thing predestined. The certainty gripped Barbold that he was seeing this tidewater track for the last time, that he had heard for the last time the great laughter of young Bill Gallard.

He asked himself fiercely:

"Are you a fitty old woman, or a tough-gutted man? Be off from this."

He swung about for the wheelhouse, struggling to hold the free fighting mood that had been lifted by the battle with the breaking log rafts in black weather and white water. Cap'n Damnable himself had led the charge on the huge timbers as they bucked through the boomsticks. He was drenched and battered, but triumphant. The logs were tied up from the storm. The *Noah* was free to beat on to Seattle—to grab a tow on the *Mohican,* so the crew believed.

But Cap'n Damnable was heading hell-bent for John Pennell. Violence personified, he was descending on Illahee as Samson descended on the Philistines.

WHILE John Pennell was whispering his warning to Lily Neal, Captain Dick Furniss, in a gale-smothering voice, was ordering wine to be served in a gallery booth. Lily begged off.

"I've a song on now." She smiled. "There are memories in it—for us. Do you remember 'Lorena,' Dick?"

"I remember." Furniss leered. "Too well, mayhap," he added with a monstrous wink.

Lily Neal was frowning as she leaned close to Pennell. She whispered.

"It is as I feared; he has told Cap'n Damnable about me in Sydney Town; he told him that I used to drug sailors for the crimps."

Pennell scowled, then shrugged his shoulders, the muscles rippling and bulging the broadcloth of his coat.

"Well, Damnable is not on deck," he said confidently. "Gallard is. Get him out of here and aboard the *Mary Dunstan* as soon as you may."

Lily Neal nodded her yellow head, smiled again at the grinning bear of a Furniss, and slipped behind the wall curtain of the stage. In a moment she appeared among the musicians, with a white silk shawl over her bare shoulders and the bodice of her red dancing dress.

Lily Neal's hair was a golden glow in the lamplight, and her deep blue eyes looked upon the crowd like a child's. Time and sin had left few marks on her. In lamplight, her thin, clear voice vibrating in a sentimental ballad of the time,

Lily Neal seemed somewhat angelic even to the cynics who knew her well.

The queen of Illahee was a child of the age and the land—of Sydney Town. Infamous years were coiled in wait for her. She lived them out as Sydney Lil, notorious leader of a gang of coastwise sharks who preyed on sailors. She died, and that queer angelic strain of her survived in her will. It provided for a grave marked by a white shaft in a waterfront park plot. Eventually an extension of railroad yard flanked the plot. It chanced that a switch-stand was set up near Lily Neal's monument. Every night, from dusk to dawn, the red lamp of the stand shone directly upon the white shaft of stone . . . Ah, the stories . . . the old days, the old characters. . .

But on that night in Illahee they were the young days of the Sound country. And Lily Neal was yet in beauty and youth. The hard men who lived hard responded to her ballad of sentiment with the fervor of the starved being fed. There was an almost religious hush in the devil's den of John Pennell.

In that hush rose the soft wail of a fiddle, and a thin, clear voice—

"Oh, the frost is on the grass again, Lorena—"

And now, as she sang, Lily Neal thrust her slim hands out from under the shawl of white silk, and her smile shone beyond the gaping, breathless crowd between the stage and the bar.

The smile and the gesture struck young Bill Gallard in the far wall shadows. He started slowly, heavily, for the stage, shoving through the packed bodies as if they were bush in the woods. With every step the cloud of torment and suspicion lifted from him. Before Lily at last, his eyes shone faith as he stared up at her. As she ended the ballad she stooped toward Bill Gallard, and he caught her in his arms.

They swung for the bar as the crowd roared cheers and whooped for more. Lily Neal ignored the storm of applause. Clutching Gallard's bough of an arm, she faced Captain Dick Furniss.

Furniss favored her with another huge wink, then grinned through his beard at the young giant of a woodsman.

"So you're the victim," he boomed. "Have you heard from Cap'n Damnable?"

"I've heard lies from him," was the answer. "I'll hear none from any other man."

"Then fare thee well," said Furniss serenely. "So you feel, and it's no put-in of mine."

With another wink at Lily, he turned about and swaggered from the dancehall. Lily Neal gazed up at Gallard with tearful eyes.

"They will believe no good of me, Laughing Bill," she whimpered. "I hate them—everything here. Let's be gone to the schooner, now."

"Yay-hey!" Laughter surged from Bill Gallard again, as he lifted Lily from the floor in his great hands. "The devil with what they think of you! We'll show them all. We're leaving Seattle for good, you and me. What do you say to that?"

"Whatever you say, Laughing Bill."

"Well, I say I'll have Pennell's money for my land before we take one step from Illahee. But first we'll have wine. Yay-hey, John Pennell! Wine for the house, the real Spanish!"

Illahee roared again. It roared with the lusty laughter of Bill Gallard, the laughter of a tree opening its boughs wide and lifting giant shouts from the deeps of its bole. The dancehall crowd chimed in. It was grand to be so young. Yay-hey. Laughing Bill.

BEATING up Seattle harbor at full speed, Cap'n Damnable shut down the *Noah's* engine as the lights of the coastwise lumber schooner, *Mary Dunstan,* loomed above the starboard bow. The captain hailed the watchman.

"Ahoy! Have you any Frisco passengers aboard?"

The answer sounded through the dark-

ness in a cranky Irish brogue.

"Of course not, with a deckload to top tomorrow. What's it to you, anyhow?"

Without replying, Cap'n Damnable stepped back in the wheelhouse and rang for slow speed. The *Noah* lumbered toward a ship that lifted a spiderweb shadow of spars in the night, and was swung in to be tied up at the same dock. The skipper ordered his crew to turn in. Then he boarded the *Mohican*.

A rumpus broke out on the brig as Captain Furniss was heaved forcibly from snoring slumber. Then silence again closed over the Boston ship.

The crew of the tug gratefully turned in. The gale blew on, the angry breath of the North Pacific. Hawsers creaked as the moored ships strained in the tide. The rain beat hard on decks and wharves. Its lines slanted across the squares of light that marked the windows of Illahee.

Cap'n Damnable struck out for those lights, after quitting the brig. The bear's growl of Dick Furniss, muffled by the blowing rain, wished him good luck, then faded in a laugh.

BILL GALLARD was drunk. For once the sight of him so, bleary and staggering, was pleasing to Cap'n Damnable. The tidewater skipper had entered Illahee unseen. He hauled up and took his bearings in the same shadowy spot in which Gallard had waited two hours ago.

Another square dance was on the boards. Pennell himself took the stage to call the sets. The captain saw this as a break of luck in his favor. If he could remain unobserved for a round or two of the dance, only Bill Gallard might threaten the clear run of his plan. And the big lad had the blind staggers even now.

A vision of faith blazed up for Cap'n Damnable. In his obscure way he felt himself another Saul on a road to Damascus. The light struck like a sword on his pestilence of human evil in a clean, free land. For the moment the helion of the Sound stood solidly gripped by the exaltation of the crusader.

He remembered, as in a fever, the good strong men of this land. Whitman of the Columbia. Loughlin and Applegate of Oregon. Asa Mercer of Seattle—Mercer, the righteous and romantic adventurer, who had twice gone overland to New York and Boston to bring wives to the womanless men of the settlement. On his last journey Asa Mercer had chartered a schooner and brought a cargo of marriageable girls around the Horn. All found, good husbands, and so Seattle became a town of families and homes.

Asa Mercer had the strength and courage to destroy John Pennell, but he was a man who waited on the law, and Pennell kept the law on his side. This could be only a mission of violence. Cap'n Damnable seemed appointed to carry it out.

So the spirit worked furiously in violent Nat Barbold of Boston. Had the pleasure of the night not been at its roaring height, just the force blazing in the man would have made the Illahee crowd feel his presence. But wine and whisky clouded the dancers. John Pennell was exulting in his dream, which would have its first realization when this dance was done. Lily Neal had the great fool of a Gallard in a way to mind her slightest word. She held him from falling as they joined in the dance.

The music surged in reeling rhythms from the stage. Pennell's voice struck in whipcrack calls.

"All promenade!"

The ragged, swaying, shouting circle of the dance eddied close to Cap'n Damnable. He eased toward the bar and hunched down behind it, waiting his chance. What he wanted was a "Swing yer partners!" with Lily Neal whirling toward his grip.

The promenade broke at another call, and the dancers sashayed on. The hall was close. From a far corner the sides

of a huge Penobscot stove glowed redly in the shadows under the gallery. The lamps were fogged by a stagnant cloud of pipe smoke. The air reeked with the smells of sweating bodies and spilled whisky. Many of the girls looked white and tired under their war paint. But all the bullies were grinning wide, roaring loud and stepping high.

They saw the scene in a roseate whisky glow. A big night in Illahee—something to talk about when you were stuck in a bull-team camp or a month out on deep water. A big night. Shake 'er up, yay-hey . . .

"All men right! Ladies on the outside, gents on the in! Swing yer partners!"

The couples formed and whirled. Booted feet stamped the floor and booted feet pawed the planks in rakish swings. Mackinaw tails lifted and waved like banners in a gale, amid a swirl of skirts and shawls. Bill Gallard, laughing thickly, tried to outdo all others in a grand sashay. A toe caught a heel, and he plunged headlong. Lily Neal jerked herself from his clasp to save herself a fall. Still spinning in the dance, she swayed back toward the door.

That stroke of fortune was a clincher in Cap'n Damnable's faith that he was the instrument of an unseen power. He growled a fierce oath like a prayer. Lily Neal whirled at the sound. For an instant she stood still, shocked, staring. Shoving out from the darkness at the end of the bar Cap'n Damnable had the look of a shape of hell bursting up through the plank floor.

His hunched shoulders bulged a black sea-coat. His huge, hairy hands reached like the claws of a timber beast, and his black eyes blazed from his scarred, distorted face. The captain's cap fell off in his lunge, and the unearthly appearance he made was intensified by a tangled mane of snow-white hair. For an instant Lily Neal stared, terror-stricken, then she screamed.

The scream slashed through a sudden hush in the dancehall. It smothered out in a gasp as the hellion of the Sound swung up the queen of Illahee in his left arm and clapped his right hand over her mouth. He backed swiftly for the door, holding Lily Neal before him as a shield.

Then Illahee roared again. Bill Gallard still lay as he had fallen, in a drunken stupor, but a dozen other men surged for Cap'n Damnable. They fell back as John Pennell charged from the stage, plucking a pistol from under the tail of his coat.

But Cap'n Damnable was already at the door. He crouched down until his shoulder was under the latch, then lifted it free. A bartender drove out for him, but a sharp kick to the knee sent the man down with a howl. Pennell, thirty feet away, paused and fired at the captain's boots, but they were driving through the door. Cap'n Damnable was used to running logs in whitecaps and almost had wings on his feet.

It was for the logs in the sheltered backwater of the mill pond that the captain headed as he quit the Illahee in a zigzagging run. Lily Neal struggled in his iron grip until he swung down with her from the sawmill wharf. Then she was quiet, but for shivers of fear, as the tidewater man lurched and plunged against the rain and wind, the packed timbers rolling and heaving underfoot in black water.

By the soggy planks of the wharf a spiderweb of ship's rigging emerged from the darkness.

"What are you doing with me?" Lily Neal demanded desperately.

"What you did to many a good man in Sydney Town," replied Cap'n Damnable. "With Dick Furness, you'll have a taste of your own hell's brew. But it won't be for long. He'll leave you where you're wanted worst—with the law in Frisco."

Ten minutes later Cap'n Damnable was returning to Illahee, with only himself and his crusader's purpose for company. Violence marched on Illahee and

on John Pennell, too.

FROM the *Noah* Cap'n Damnable took his ax, a ten-pound blade specially made for himself. He was otherwise unarmed. To woodsmen gun-toting was a mark of cowardice or of criminal intent. Besides, Barbold had always shunned firearms because of the blind use he might make of them in his sudden rages.

Anyhow, his course was set, and there would be no putting back. As he approached the waterfront street, Cap'n Damnable heard hoarse shouts through the wind. Men were combing the street and the wharves, still searching for himself and Lily. But no one had ventured too near the *Noah*.

Cap'n Damnable drove on. At last his downward gaze marked a vague moving line of white in the shadows. It was the fringe of tidewater. He swung down to the sandspit. This time he was marching on Illahee from the rear. He struck through the wet sand toward a flare of sparks. There was the back entrance of the dancehall, opening under the gallery, near the big Penobscot stove.

The heavy door was barred from the inside. Three blows from his giant ax shattered a plank. Cap'n Damnable thrust a hand through the break and pawed for the latch. It shot free. Cap'n Damnable was again in Illahee, crouching behind the red-hot bulk of the Penobscot, his ax gripped for a swing as he peered out into the hall.

The crowd was still milling in an uproar of excitement on the floor and at the bar. The captain's pursuers were returning. Pennell was talking to the territorial sheriff, furiously pounding the bar with his fist to emphasize what he was saying. Young Bill Gallard was still out, sprawled against the wall at the main entrance. Whoever had noted Cap'n Damnable's smash through the back door was discreetly ignoring it.

"It's the power working still," he thought, with prayerful conviction. "The rest is for myself to do."

With that, the hellion of the Sound heaved into action again. He dropped his ax, crouched to his knees and gripped the base of the ponderous stove. One lifting strain of his immense muscles, and the towering Penobscot toppled. The pipe joints collapsed with a tinny clamor. The stove fell like a tree, its telescoped sections rolling apart, vomiting a torrent of blazing pitch chunks and white-hot coals. From the thudding crash of iron and crackle of spreading fire lifted a cloud of smoke. Panic struck the crowd—a frenzy of screams and yells. But John Pennell kept his head. He leaped the bar and plunged through the smoke cloud for the water barrel and bucket which were kept filled for emergencies.

Of what happened to Pennell in the ensuing minute no two accounts agree. Some bards say that Cap'n Damnable swung for Pennell with his ax when the man was half blinded by smoke, and so brought him down for the branding. Again one hears that the two stood toe to toe in the midst of the blaze, like the Hebrew heroes in the fiery furnace, and slugged until Pennell was beaten down.

Whatever happened beyond the curtain of smoke and fire, John Pennell was left for dead, and Cap'n Damnable broke free and clear, his ax making way. Many of the crowd were stampeding for the door. Cap'n Damnable vanished with them, into the stormy darkness.

The braver men, recovering their wits, attacked the fire and subdued it. Then, in the smoke and steam, they picked up John Pennell—for dead. But he was not dead, only horribly marred. In the custom of the woodsmen, Cap'n Damnable had formed the spikes of his boot soles in the initials of his familiar name. So he had trampled his brand on Pennell's cheek. Like deep pockmarks, in red scars, John Pennell would bear that C D on his face for the rest of his days.

They were few men left in Seattle that night after the branding. Cap'n Damnable vanished. At dawn the *Noah* was

towing the *Mohican* into Juan de Fuca Strait. The mate was in command. Violent Nat Barbold was seeking refuge in a deeper wilderness.

And as for Laughing Bill Gallard . . .

SOME thirty years later the last boat of the season from Alaska was docking at Seattle. The first year of the Klondike rush was done. Down the gangplank streamed homecomers from the new frontier, and spread into the hysterical flood of welcomers on the dock.

One moved slowly, with the stiff shamble of age. On the dock he stood apart from the milling crowd, staring like a man in a dream at the waterfront scene, the city on the hills. Something about the man caught the eye of a hustling reporter—an amazing breadth of mackinawed shoulders over a caved-in chest; hands like oak knots dangling from the sleeves of the blanket coat; a blaze in the black eyes peering from the scarred and age-furrowed face.

"What's the story, old-timer?" asked the reporter.

"Story?" asked Nat Barbold dazedly. Then, "I'm no miner. Just a river-boat man who has saved enough to live out his days in peace—"

His voice shook into silence. The black eyes blazed again in a stare down the dock. From the midst of a group boomed the laugh of a giant. It was like a tree laughing, a tree opening wide its boughs—

"Who is that?" demanded the old-timer, with a force that made the reporter jump. "That man with the great laugh yonder?"

"And I thought you was the original sourdough," was the scornful answer. "That's Gallard of Seattle, of the Tidewater Lumber Company, the Tidewater Line of ships, and so on. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"That's enough," said Nat Barbold gently. "I am content."

Buck Fever

By Bert Cooksley

SINCE early dawn, through manzanita brush,
Across rock streams and shallows, working up
To toplands where the giant redwoods crush
Their green lips to the new moon's spilling cup;
Since dawn we marked his tracks and trailed him down
Far groves and clearings, fields and vales, until,
Breasting a summit, we beheld his crown
Lifted a moment on a neighbor hill.

Stealthy then, our hearts aflame, we made
Our way across to him, silent as death,
On hands and knees and bellies—half afraid
To draw in or let out a single breath;
And then we saw him close! Thrice twenty feet
Away—no more!—like something in a dream,
One hoof upraised, his satin flanks a-beat,
From out his nostrils burst white clouds of steam.

My gun was up, I had a perfect sight,
My finger wrapped the trigger as if wired . . .
"A lifetime's chance," they said in camp that night.
But I say no man living could have fired!

Concluding

Gordon Young's Gallant Novel of the Civil War

When The Bravest Trembled

The Story Thus Far:

RAND LANISTER, when he left Texas to join the Union Army, estranged his entire family—his father; his uncle Randolph of New Orleans, who was a Confederate general; his distant cousin Judith with whom he was in love; and, most conspicuously of all, his cousin Valentine. Rand hoped to avoid his Southern relatives by enlisting at faraway Washington; but it happened that all his family were with the Confederate forces in Virginia in 1861. Inevitably Rand encountered them, when, as a spy, for Colonel William Tecumseh Sherman, he rode in the Rebel uniform with Major Silliker, also Southern-born, into Virginia just before the Battle of Bull Run.

To avoid conflict, after an unexpected meeting at the old Silliker plantation, Rand fled from his father. However, he did not have time to regain the Northern lines; so, during the Battle of Bull Run, he appeared in Confederate uniform among the Rebels. Hopelessly confused, he rode back and forth during the battle; not fighting himself, but pretending to be on urgent missions for superior officers. During the course of the day fate threw him alongside his cousin Valentine. Thinking quickly, Rand anticipated his cousin and set up the cry that Valentine was an impostor, a Yankee, a spy. Then he seized Valentine, with the intention of delivering him to an officer for safe-keeping, so that he himself might escape.

Rand knew that Valentine would eventually extricate himself from the situation. Rand had always liked Val. Val's ex-fiancée, Laura Willamotte, although a Rebel spy, had shot and killed Major Clarky of the Washington military police to save Rand's life. Laura, denounced as part-colored instead of the child of the Willamottes who had raised her, was now serving General Beauregard. Rand hoped eventually to have it proven that Laura was a true Willamotte, that only the malicious gossip of men like Captain Terris had created the scandal which broke her betrothal to Valentine.

Of this concern on Rand's part, Valentine was ignorant. He was furious when Rand cleverly delivered him to the first Confederate officer he met. It was Pap Reed, a homespun colonel from the backwoods of Mississippi.

"Tie him up," Rand said. "He's awful tricky. And tell General Beauregard that I caught him."

HEN, said Pap, "yo' take one o' youah galluses an' tie him up!" Henry, glad to be of service, at once gave his musket to another man and unbuttoned from across his shoulder one of the straps that held up his trousers. With the help of other soldiers to hold Valentine's writhing wrists, Henry tied them tightly.

"My hoss," said Rand, "is all wore out. I'll just take his. And if I see the general, I'll tell him, Pap, yo' have got this fellow. So be sho' to keep 'im, too!"

Rand jumped into the saddle, riding off. Behind him, Valentine protested, begging men to stop Rand, to hold him, shoot—anything! Pap answered soothingly, proud of his capture. The lanky Mississippians waved hats and hands to Rand as he turned and grinned.

Rand had not gone far when he realized that the sound of the battle was changing.

Batteries were cracking angrily, but shells were not coming. Musketry rattled, but there was no buzz and whine, no hail-like pattering among twigs and leaves. Above all this rose the cry of men, whoops echoing with triumph—the sound of victory on the battlefield.

Rand found himself on the flank of a regiment of cavalry that had picked its way swiftly through the woods and without reforming begun to gallop furiously. He wondered what was up. They certainly were not fleeing. There was no sign of Union soldiers, but these men were greatly excited. Their faces were flushed, eyes hot, mouths open in jubilant yelps. Rand spurred among them as the surest way of not being questioned for hanging back. They followed a wild horseman of a colonel who rode at breakneck speed, sword in hand. Most of these cavalrymen carried muskets and shotguns as well as sidearms.

The best riders among them went over rail fences with flying leaps. Some rails were knocked off, lowering the hurdle for others. Some horses fell, but the riders scrambled up, cursing, excited, unhurt, and went on.

Rand had got in among reckless Virginians—rich men born to the saddle and riding the finest horses in the country.

Suddenly the river lay before them. They did not pull rein, but charged with a plunging crash through the fringe of brush and into Bull Run. Off to the left, less than a mile away, was the deadly, steady, ripping sound of exploding shells. The river was about forty feet wide, barely fordable even for these daredevils. Horses and men floundered. The men swore and laughed. Hats were lost, clothes drenched. Arms flung up muskets and shotguns to keep them dry.

Across the river the breakneck colonel made a hasty effort to reform his regiment, but gave it up impatiently with a shout of, "Follow me!"

They set out across a field, again leaping fences and ditches, and entered a thick wood at a gallop. Such riding over such ground was unfamiliar to Rand; but not, he found, to his horse. Valentine had somehow got another as good as the one he had given the dismounted Beauregard. Rand let the horse have its head and bowed his own to escape limbs.

They came to a clearing with a fence running before the wood. Not a horseman pulled rein. They charged, yelling, through or over the fence and bounded into the yard of a farmhouse where wounded and dead soldiers lay—Mrs. Spindle's house. The Union Army had been using it for a hospital, and many unwounded had taken shelter there. Cavalrymen rode up to the door, calling on the Yanks to come out; and as they came out they were shot down. They had sworn to take no prisoners this day.

The regiment then swung away at full gallop, dashed through a fringe of wood that went right to the road's edge. There the Virginia cavalry debouched with headlong fury, yelling wildly; and, with almost pointblank volleys of muskets and shotguns, struck the flank of the retreating Union Army's rearguard.

When Rand saw that he was being crowded headlong into a charge on Yankees he could not swerve aside and dared not draw rein. He clapped the reins into his mouth, pulled, jerking, at his blouse as if stripping the better to fight, and knocked off his hat. Nothing of the Confederate uniform remained but his trousers, concealed to the knee by the jackboots. He crouched low in the saddle and spurred as hard as he could, fairly crowding the men before him.

As the charge struck the square, Rand spurred savagely, making his horse rear and lunge until he broke through the foremost line of the cavalry and went on right into the center of the shattered square.

Rand flung himself off as if shot from the saddle, fell into the dust, and was dragged and jerked about as he clung to the bridle. He arose with a drunken stagger, drew his revolver and began firing into the cavalry.

Sherman tempestuously rallied his men with, "Fire—fire! Keep firing! Almighty hell, boys, *fire!*" and pointed at the enemy as he rode before men who were trying to run.

The Virginians quickly reined back and scattered; some going this way, some that, as they broke up into small excited groups, all with utter haphazard lack of discipline or purposeful direction. Many galloped ahead, yelling, increasing the terror of the rout; some raced through the woods, looking for stragglers and fugitives as hunters look for game; others dismounted behind trees, shooting into the crowded road.

SCORES of men, Sherman among them, had seen what Rand did. All at first thought he had been shot from his horse; but as he arose, firing, they understood that a Union man was escaping from his Confederate companions.

Rand dizzily looked up into Sherman's grim, haggard face as he frowned from the saddle without a particle of recognition.

"Who the devil are you?"

"Me? Gosh a'mighty, Colonel!"

Rand lifted a hand, wiping his face, and looked at his hand. It was covered with moistened dust. His face was masked with dust from falling into the road. Nobody could have recognized him.

"I'm Lanister!"

Sherman dismounted at a jump, shook Rand's hand and thumped his shoulder. He turned, shouting orders, and between the orders flashed phrases at Rand:

"Silliker got through this morning . . . Captain, unlimber those field pieces! Those horsemen bunching up back there look as if they had a mind to charge again— Served as my aide all day, but lost somewhere in the shuffle now . . .

"Captain Terris, sir! Be good enough to oblige your commanding officer by getting out where the enemy can see you. Oh, I know you are sick. So am I!

"Who the devil could have expected cavalry to come out of the woods like that! Damn 'em, if those Virginians had only studied military textbooks they'd have known cavalry can't charge through a wood. Impossible! Not having studied fool books they went ahead and did it! Close up there! Keep moving. Had a major's commission in my pocket for Silliker. He was wounded in the arm. Sergeant Gnowtal, sir, by heaven, you are a soldier!"

Sherman jerked out his watch.

"Four o'clock. All damn nonsense, our licking! But we've learned one thing, boy. Have to do more than say *boo!* to make the Rebs run any other direction than at us . . . All right, Colonel, give the word to blow up that bridge. Keep them from following with field pieces. Get on your horse, Orderly. We've got work to do . . ."

A bold Rebel yelled from his saddle at the edge of the woods—

"Can the South secede, Yanks?"

Men shouted sullenly—

"Who the hell cares!"

Others grumbled:

"Why the hell did we ever care! Lousy fools, all of us! Damn niggers!"

Men growled affirmingly. All this grimy, luckless, blood-drenched work over niggers.

Sherman's brigade was sullenly weary, without pride in being the rear guard. It marched back to Centerville and was drawn up in the same camp that it had left that morning at two o'clock. Sentries and pickets were posted, and promptly fell asleep or deserted. Men crept off into the darkness, going toward Washington.

CHAPTER XV

The Blackmailer

THREE days later Sherman had searched out his scattered regiments among the rout in Washington and had them in their old camp at Fort Corcoran.

He was a changed man, and meant that they should be changed men too. He drilled them mercilessly under the shotted guns of his battery of regulars. Three times a day they were drawn up in full equipment and kept in ranks until he in person inspected and dismissed them.

One morning Sherman had just dismissed a regiment and, with Rand at his heels, was leaving when Captain Terris came up, saluted, smiled in his sly way and said with a smirk of friendliness:

"Colonel, I am going to New York. Is there anything I can do for you there?"

Men were all about, pressing closer, with heads outthrust, listening. Rand believed then, and never afterward changed his opinion, that Terris, who did have a sly audacity very like perverted courage, had let numbers of these men know that he was going to make a test of Sherman and show them that, after all, they would be perfectly safe in defying him, as men were doing with officers in other camps. In other words, Terris would prove that Sherman was bluffing when he said he would order the artillery to fire on men who defied his authority.

"New York?" Sherman snapped. "I haven't signed your leave of absence!"

"No," said Terris with a sly, defiant air. "But my time is up. I enlisted for three months only. I am a lawyer. Business is pressing, and I am going."

The glare in Sherman's dark eyes was like a blow. His voice crackled. No man for a hundred feet around could fail to hear.

"Any attempt to leave without permission will be mutiny, and I will shoot you like a dog!"

The sly smile was wiped off Terris's black-bearded face. His forehead turned pale and he jerked himself back, sick with fright; for Sherman, with a characteristic gesture, hastily thrust his hand inside the breast of his coat, very much as if snatching at a revolver.

The listening soldiers moved away quickly, going in the attitude of men who tiptoed out of danger and glancing back uneasily.

THAT afternoon drums beat the assembly. Word was passed that the President was coming to inspect the troops. He came in an open hack, with Sherman riding on the seat with the driver. The carriage stopped before the ranks. Men presented arms and were brought to parade rest.

Lincoln stood up in the carriage. He was then merely President Lincoln; not yet Old Abe, strolling about, chatting with soldiers, trying his hand with an ax on camp woodpiles, watching sharpshooters at target practice, wiping the dirty eyes of kittens with his handkerchief and telling colonels to see that they had milk.

Men caught their breath, surprised and a little amused at the tallness of him. The impression was intensified by his standing in the carriage and by the

high, cylindrical, narrow-brimmed black hat he wore. He had a rangy awkwardness of bearing, but no nervousness; and his face had the gaunt look of a man half starved. He spoke softly, clearly, with a smooth tonality that reached out like a benediction. He admitted Bull Run had been a bad affair, urged the need of fortitude, said the war must go on, and praised them for their conspicuous, brave part in the midst of disaster.

Men broke into cheers; but Lincoln's arm swayed in a gesture for silence, and he said:

"Don't cheer, boys. I rather like it myself, but Colonel Sherman here says that it is not military. He says we have had too much hurrahing and humbug. I guess we had better defer to his opinion. But I want you boys to know that I, as your Commander-in-Chief, will do everything for you that is possible. And if any of you feels that he has a grievance that ought to be righted, I want you to tell me about it—tell me personally!"

The soldiers were greatly heartened; and when ranks were broken they crowded about the carriage. Then Captain Terris stalked through the crowd and came right up to the carriage step. Terris's black-bearded face was set determinedly.

Sherman, on the front seat, saw him and knew what was coming; but there was nothing to be done about it, so he, to quote Sherman's own words, sat "quiet as a lamb." Which was one of the few times in his turbulent life that the restless Tecumseh was ever lamblike.

"Mr. President!" said Terris in a ringing voice, vibrant with outrage. "I have cause for grievance!"

Lincoln gazed down, benign and wary.

"This morning I went to speak to Colonel Sherman and he threatened to shoot me!"

Lincoln straightened with an air of sympathetic surprise. His dark eyes lingered on Terris's face, where lay the subtly blended lines of selfishness, cruelty and audacity; a dangerously cunning man, this Terris.

"Threatened to shoot you?" Lincoln repeated with mild astonishment.

"Yes, sir, he threatened to shoot me!" Terris cried, feeling that this was his moment of triumph.

Lincoln shook his head with regret and sympathy, then bent his tall, lanky body toward the expectant Terris and said in a stage-whisper that reached the outermost edge of the crowding soldiers—

"Well, if I were you, and he threatened to shoot me, I would not trust him, for I believe he would do it!"

Men laughed, tittering, then uproariously. Terris grew red and for a moment stood as if stunned. He turned, and men laughed in his face as they stepped back, making way while he strode past them with a glazed, desperate look in his eyes.

That night Captain Terris disappeared. A few days later he was posted as a deserter.

SHERMAN called Rand into his office.

"Go get some chevrons sewn on your arm, Corporal Lanister."

"Corporal? I don't know nothing about being a corporal."

Sheman slapped his hand sharply on the desk.

"Of course, you don't. I don't know anything about being a general, either. But instead of being cashiered for stampeding, a lot of us runaway colonels have been made brigadier-generals! A hell of a thing. No harder for you to learn a corporal's duties than for me to learn a general's. Go get your chevrons!"

That afternoon Rand was talking with Mr. Raze, who had made his way back to Washington right after the battle, when Silliker came up. His right arm was still in a sling. He wore the

uniform of a major, U. S. A.

Mr. Raze grumbled—

"It is shore hard f'r to tell which side anybody's on in this war." Then he hobbled away.

Rand saluted, grinning. Major Silliker smiled slowly, but even in smiling his thin face was still sad. He put out his hand and held Rand's with warm affection, then fingered the chevrons.

"If I act as swelled up as I feel, I'll get mistook fo' a colonel!" said Rand. "You've had some luck, too!"

"Luck?" Major Silliker's tone held the word questioningly. "Yes, luck of my usual kind." He reached, fumbling with his left hand, to his pocket and drew out a folded newspaper. An article was marked. The heading said: "A Noble Statement." It was a Richmond paper and the statement was from Senator Silliker.

Irrefutable proof of a Silliker's traitorous defection had been brought to his attention. A Silliker was now an officer in the mercenary Lincolnite Army. The Senator humbly begged to remind his countrymen that years before he had utterly disowned and cast from his presence this contemptible person who had been born under his roof and for a time accepted as a son. The Senator expressed the profound hope that this person, if ever captured in battle, would not be treated as a prisoner of war, but as a spy and traitor.

Rand shook his head. He felt very bad.

"My dad feels like that, too, I bet."

Major Silliker returned the paper to his pocket.

"The worst of it, boy, is that the Senator is really one of the most lovable and generous men alive. He merely thinks that is the way he ought to feel. He is determined to feel that way, and to make other people think they ought to feel that way, too. Pride—Southern pride. You can't break it. That is why this will be a terrible war. As General Sherman says, this is a time when the bravest tremble."

The major looked about cautiously and lowered his voice.

"I just wanted to tell you that she is back in Washington and—"

"Doggone her!"

"—and something will have to be done about it. But right now she has greater influence with Heckle than ever. Even poor McDowell believes in her still. She has been presented to the President as a Union heroine."

"Gosh a'mighty, can't folks see straight —or is it just 'cause she is pretty?"

"Not wholly. Guess what she did!"

"A fellow would weah his tongue out trying."

"Too late for the information to do a particle of good, she got messengers through to McDowell, and to Heckle here in Washington, telling that Johnston was at Manassas. Pre-dated letters. The messengers coached, of course, in stories of how they had been delayed, captured, escaped, and that kind of thing. Heckle and everybody—or almost everybody—believes she nearly saved the Army. Think we are fortunate in having a woman who has so completely hoodwinked Beauregard!

"I tell you, boy, she is as dangerous as a whole Confederate division, and now will be as hard to rout. And I don't know just how to go about it. But supposing you give me a statement of how Clarky was killed. With that it might be possible to frighten her into leaving Washington and staying away. If she knows you have put it into writing, then—"

"Nope. I won't—just won't." Rand looked at him steadily. "I ain't much good at lying, but I'll sho' as hell lie about that thing just as long as I can wiggle. Where's she living?"

"In the same house with a Mrs. Margate. Nigger, that Margate woman."

"Nigger? Since when did niggers quit being black?"

"When the Louisiana planters started breeding them for the quadroon balls!"

"Oh, I 'membeh now. Gosh a'mighty!"

That evening Rand asked General

Sherman for a pass. Instead of sending him to his adjutant, Sherman wrote it, saying—

"And if you come back drunk, I'll tear those chevrons off."

"If I eveh come back drunk yo' can teah my head off!"

As Rand was getting on his horse to go into Washington, Mr. Raze hobbled up.

"Whar ye goin', son?"

Rand told him.

"Think maybe I ortn't go along?"

"You betteh hadn't, Bill. Hard fo' you to hobble."

"Saddle 'r kerrige is easy on me. An' bein' a cripple don't hinder me none from doin' what I want. But I ain't shore I want to go an' see her."

"Does she know yo' are a Reb scout, too?"

"I got a warnin' feelin', same as when an Injun's some'eres near, that she does." Mr. Raze dipped into his pocket and drew out a crumpled note, which read:

> Dear Mr. Raze, I recently learned of your wound, and I do so hope that you will take a long, long rest; for it would be very dangerous to engage again on difficult undertakings without first making sure that everything is all right. Your *friend,*
>
> —Laura Lorraine

Rand frowned for a moment, then tapped the note.

"Bill, she's marked 'friend' special. She don't fo'get favors, but she's sho' tellin' you polite to stay cleah away from the Reb lines!"

"I'm willin', son. But that feller the colonel—gen'ral I mean—loans me to hopes my leg'll get well right soon."

"Then yo' are goin' to quit scoutin'—fo' both Armies?"

"Depends."

"On what, Bill."

"Oh what you do, son."

"How what I do?"

"If you go monkeyin' round over behind Reb lines agin, I'll have to tag along to see if you are gettin' on all right." Mr. Raze spat, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and shook his head, puzzled. "This is shore a funny war. Yanks an' Rebs cuss each other like a flock of magpies, yet like your maw said the Bible said we ort—you an' me, son—to do good to our en'mies. They are purt-near our best friends. F'r me to enjoy this here war proper, all the Clarky and Geold fellers would have to be on one side—I don't keer which one—an' you an' me an' General Sherman an' Colonel Pap Reed an' your dad on t'other. Then they'd be some sense to fightin'! Thisaway I hate to see either side git licked."

RAND left his horse at a livery stable and took a cab to Miss Laura's address, again arriving early in the evening; but this time he passed the gate with a swinging stride and rattled the knocker as if he owned the house.

He wore belt and sidearms, as if on duty; he knew he shouldn't, but liked having them, and counted on Sherman's favor to escape punishment if by chance reported.

The tall Mrs. Margate looked anxiously through the barely opened door.

"Oh." It sounded as if she had expected some one else to be there. "Good evening, sir." She seemed hopeful that he would conclude his business on the porch.

"I want to see Miss Laura." Rand had acquired a lot of assurance since his first visit to this house.

"But s-she—" Mrs. Margate's denial failed her. "Come in, sir."

"I'm obliged."

Mrs. Margate closed the door, walked to the foot of the stairs and called quietly, knowing some one waited there, listening.

"Mr. Lanister, Miss Laura."

"Rand? Oh, how are you?" Miss Laura sounded merry and delighted. "I'll be right down in a minute, Rand!"

Mrs. Margate reached for his hat but Rand held it behind him.

"No, m'am! Not this time!"

She did not smile. They exchanged glances, then she turned away, lighted the gas in a room off the hall way and invited him to sit there.

Laura came, dressed for a ball. Washington might be shivering with apprehension lest Beauregard and Johnston march on it, but balls were given, mostly by families that secretly prayed for the coming of the Confederates.

She ran up to him with frank delight and almost more than a sister's affection. He was disconcerted, not unpleasantly. All the harsh commands which were to be insisted upon grew lumpish in his throat, and he knew he could not bully and bluff this lovely girl who exclaimed:

"Rand! I simply can't tell you how glad I am to see you. And, oh, what a famous fellow you are now!"

He shied distrustfully, even if pleased and grinning. Her eyes sparkled, and her affectionate familiarity was as if they had played together when children and grown up in childhood's intimacy; but somehow as if she were the older and, with the privilege of maturity, might tease him.

"I've got something awful serious to talk about." His tone was desperate—desperately hopeless.

She seemed to read his mind and was amused.

"Oh, I am sure you have, Rand. Of course, I am a terribly wicked woman. And you—you simply can't possibly understand how any person could fall so low as to be a spy!" Her laughter was pure music. Miss Laura was very happy tonight. "And such a dangerous, crafty spy! Even rallied his enemy's troops on the field."

"I was just plain scairt. Had to do something."

"Of course! And no doubt you were scairt too, when you persuaded that odd Colonel Reed to capture Valentine!"

Rand grinned.

"I bet ol' Pap could eat me alive!"

"No, but poor Valentine could! Those gawky Mississippians marched him right through the army, his hands tied behind him with galluses! He wanted your old Colonel Pap hanged on the spot. You would have loved General Beauregard, Rand—more than you ever possibly can Sherman."

"Nice fellow, youah general, seems like."

"He said he could not very well be severe with Colonel Pap since you had as completely hoodwinked other colonels and both the ranking generals of the army. Offered your loaded revolver to General Beauregard, himself! Rand, these old Yankees don't know how to appreciate men."

She touched his chevrons scornfully.

"General Beauregard would have made you a captain. And Judith, Rand—Judith really can't think that being a black old Yankee is so utterly debasing when at Senator Silliker's dinner table she heard General Beauregard laugh and praise you. And your uncle, Rand—General Lanister—clapped his hands together and said, 'I knew I would never be ashamed of that boy!' They say even your father looked proud when he heard of it." Laura's slim hand pointed toward the wall. "They love you there, Rand. South! Why don't you go?"

"You've got to go back and stay there!"

"Or you'll have me—" She mocked him, teasing.

"I won't neitheh, and you know it. But you've got to go, that's all. Yo' are makin' Bill quit goin' South. He showed me his note. So it's on'y fair you've got to quit being up North heah!"

"Isn't it nice to be such friendly enemies! I warned your dear old Mr. Bill for his own good. After Colonel Pap learned that you were a spy, he decided Mr. Raze must be one too. It nearly broke his heart. He liked you and old Bill."

"Well, me, too. I got to give *you* warning!" Rand tried his best to look stern.

"Oh, don't be silly! Did I say a word that day at Senator Silliker's?"

"No. I mean, yes! You told Major Silliker—he's a major now—that if he wanted to save his neck, he'd betteh see that I got home safe!"

"I am not through with Joe Silliker yet!" Laura's tone was angry. "Blackleg card player!"

"He ain't!"

"He is, Rand. He was thrown out of the Army and disowned by his father for cheating at cards!"

"Sho'—but he didn't cheat!"

"He said not, did he? What a simpleton you are, Rand!"

"Gosh a'mighty, be quiet a little! He didn't cheat. That day I heard his crippled half-brother upstairs in that house admit he done it. When he was hurt awhile back, this fellow up and told the truth. That's why they was all so glad to see Major Silliker home. And he's all right, the major is. You owe him more than you think. When he was dressing up to be spies he saw my revolver. Somehow by the number he knew it was Clarky's, so—"

Laura listened with face bent forward in frowning moodiness.

Rand concluded: "—so he's done you as big a favor heah in Washington as you done him there at his house. But he says yo' are worse than a thousand soldiers, and somehow we've got to make you get out of Washington and stay out!"

"Ah! So Corporal Rand's orders to me are, 'Git!' "

"You bet!"

"General Heckle says, 'Remain in Washington, dear. Don't again risk your precious life in perilous duty!' General McDowell says, 'Miss Lorraine, if all our soldiers had been as trustworthy as you, Bull Run would have been a victory!' And Mr. Lincoln, Rand, said, 'Young lady, from the bottom of my heart I thank you for your daring and loyalty!' But Corporal Rand says, 'Laura, git or—' Or just what, Rand?"

"You going to stay here in Washington after you know folks suspect you?"

"Would you run from a battle because you were afraid you might be wounded?"

"I'm a man."

"And I, dear child, am a woman, sworn to serve—"

"Don't call me that!"

"Certainly not, Corporal!"

"Doggone you!"

LAURA laughed, patting his arm, and inquired enigmatically—

"But just supposing that some day some general, like General Heckle for instance, learns that you, at the battle of Bull Run, helped rally the broken Confederate lines?"

"I told General Sherman."

"But supposing some one told General Heckle?" she insisted.

"You mean you might tell 'im?"

"Oh, Rand, I ought to hate you. I really ought. Our fathers are enemies. You are a Yankee—the stubbornest Yankee on earth! But I don't. I never will. If you had ten sisters, not all of them together would love you as I do. More than even you, I love Judith. When my own sisters drew away from me, when every girl and woman in the countryside sniffed and pulled skirts aside, Judith Lanister walked with her arm about me for everybody to see!"

"I don't believe it eitheh," said Rand moodily.

"Believe what?"

"That story about you."

Laura straightened alertly. Her face was shadowed with distrust.

"Then you do know about me?"

Rand nodded.

"You said you didn't!"

"I didn't." He took a deep breath, sighed nervously. "Honest."

"When did you learn? Who told you? Tell me, Rand!" He was shaking his head stubbornly. "If I guess, will you tell me? Was it Captain Terris?"

"You oughtn't even pretend to be

friends with that fellow!"

"Then he told you."

Rand shook his head as he said—

"I'm not going to tell you."

"Sherman?"

"I won't tell you, I told you!"

"I had hoped that no one but General Heckle and Terris knew that I am really Laura Willamotte. But it was Sherman or Terris that told you, wasn't it, Rand?"

"How'd that Terris eveh come to know about you, anyhow?"

Laura made a repugnant grimace.

"But I thought he would be the last person on earth to tell, since he still hopes that I may marry him."

"My holy gosh, you marry him and I'll—I'll purt-neah hope you do get hung!"

"That is just the way I feel about it, too, Rand!" she said, bitter and amused. "But I have had to handle him so carefully. He thinks I hate the South because of that story. He was in New Orleans at the time. I don't know how he heard it. But I suppose nearly every one did. He had proposed before. Then did at once, again—even then. Said he didn't care what people said, or even if it was true!"

Laura shuddered.

"I had detested him always—detested him more than ever when he said that he did not care. If he had said merely that he did not believe it—but not to *care!* Pah! As if I were a negress, and he didn't care." She shuddered repugnantly. Then, with a fierce clutch at Rand: "But I am not. I know I'm not!"

"Then why don't you make Valentine know it, too!"

"Valentine? I wouldn't marry Valentine now if he were king of the earth and crawled at my feet. Though I would give body and soul to have him crawl."

"So you could kick him, huh?"

"So I could smile a little and shake my head," she said, dreamily wistful. "But why don't you believe it, Rand?"

"Just don't, that's all. Now yo' tell me something honest. Are you making dunces out of all us Yankees up heah so folks down South that think maybe that story is true will like you a lot anyhow?"

"You answer my question first, Rand. Why don't you believe it?"

"Why don't Judith? And my uncle? And maybe you'll hate me, too, like you hate Terris, but I don't care if you are! Yo' are a fine woman!"

"No, I don't hate you. You are not asking me to marry you. But the man who would say he does not care whether or not be is marrying a negress is —don't you understand how I have to feel about that?" She clasped her hands together and shivered. "Ugh! But I am not. I really am not. Mrs. Margate is the slave mother whose child I am supposed to be."

"Then you can prove you ain't!"

"No, no. Listen. I went to Martinique. I had to find her, buy her. She had been treated like a lady by the good old Frenchman. But I just had to live with her so I could see for myself how she would treat me. I knew she would tell me the truth. And she knew nothing about it! But nobody in the world would believe that perhaps she wasn't lying to protect me. Don't you see?"

"No, I don't see! Does my uncle know you've found her?"

"Never! Do you think I could spoil his friendship by what he might inistake for a cheap little trick to persuade him!"

"But if somebody made folks know you wasn't, would you quit—"

"That can't be, Rand, because everybody in the South knows that if I were Mrs. Margate's child she would swear under torture that I wasn't!"

"Ain't nothing that can't be done! Then would you quit being here spying and—and—"

"And passing for the mistress of General Heckle?" Laura asked with a frankness that made Rand's ears color. "Yes, Rand. I know it is all incomprehensible to you—or certainly to Yankees! They

make fun of our chivalry because they haven't any of their own! As long as my blood is supposed to be tainted, I can be admired by people that I respect for doing what I do to help the South. But as a pure blooded Southern lady, I could not! Would your uncle let Judith live here in Washington as I do, no matter what information she might obtain? No, no, no!"

"But if he don't believe that story, why does he let *you*?"

"Oh, Rand, don't you see, he doesn't really believe; but he can't entirely disbelieve it. There is a doubt—there must always be a doubt. If there was no doubt, General Beauregard, valuable though I am to him, would not let me stay here a minute."

"Then, by holy gosh, him and my uncle has got to know somehow!"

"No, no, Rand! No! You must not try! They would think I had encouraged you. That I had tricked you and was trying to trick them too. Oh, Rand, can't you see they would merely think it was a scheme, a plot? At most they would merely believe that Mrs. Margate just lied stubbornly to help her own child win back a social position. To have them think that would be worse than to have them believe I am a negress. I forbid you, Rand!"

He brooded and nodded.

"I reckon maybe yo' are right. But, gosh a'mighty, it ain't right when you ain't! And you've got to be made to get out of Washington and stay out."

"I am not going to leave Washington because of any threats or dangers, Rand. You—and Joe Silliker—may as well reconcile yourselves to that! If I am ever punished as a spy, then as long as there is a woman, man or child alive below the Mason and Dixon line, Laura Willamotte will be remembered and respected as a girl who loyally loved and gave her life for the South! So there, Mr. Corporal Rand! Now do you understand?"

"Gosh a'mighty, then you want to get shot or hung?"

"No, of course not, you silly boy! But I would rather be shot and hanged both than—"

The knocker clattered. Laura said in excitement:

"Quick, Rand. Come into the next room and wait. That is probably Captain Terris. He won't remain long. I will see to that!"

"What you seeing him fo'?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he wants to propose again. Quick, Rand!"

"He's a deserter!"

"He is? I didn't know that. I'm glad to know. But quick!"

"Every time I come heah I have to hide from somebody."

He picked up his hat, followed her across the room and stepped through the door, passing into an unlighted room. Laura closed the door. Rand at once gently turned the knob, making a crack's width, and put his eye against it.

MRS. MARGATE ushered in a smooth shaven, pale man, thin of cheek with sunken eyes. The voice was Terris's, and so was the sly, unctuous manner, wheedling and menacing. He had shaved off his beard, changed to civilian clothes, and felt that no one in the army would recognize him.

"Ah, good evening, Laura." He had an uneasy air of trying to appear perfectly sure of himself, and stroked the lapel of his coat as if soothing himself.

"Good evening, Captain." She was aloof, neither friendly nor unfriendly.

"More beautiful than ever!"

"Sarcastic this evening, Captain?"

"You know I am not, Laura. I mean that. I love you—I shall always love you—though after tonight I may never see you again!" He sighed and looked woeful, hoping for sympathy.

"Ah," Laura murmured, trying not to seem pleased. "What do you mean? Won't you sit down?"

"I'll stand. This is business. I haven't much time." He gave her a peculiar look and smiled craftily. "My note made you wonder, no doubt. So

now let us get to the point. I do love you, Laura, but at a time like this I can't afford to be sentimental. I am a desperate man and must have money so—"

Instantly she interrupted, quite as if she knew what to expect, had long ago thought the matter over and made her decision:

"For any penny you shall ever have from me, sir, as the price of your silence, you may spread my story wherever you like! Good evening, *Mister* Terris!"

Her dark eyes flashed. She turned her wrist in an imperious gesture of dismissal toward the door.

That set him back on his heels quite as if he had been slapped in the face.

"Oh, now, Laura, come! Wait. You misunderstand. Ha! Ha!" He quickly got back his sly composure and the hurt air of one unjustly suspected. "Bless you, I wouldn't so much as think of a thing like that. On my honor! But, Laura, how much will you give for absolute proof that the story Valentine Lanister told about you is false, eh?"

She looked at him steadily.

"What do you mean?"

The question intoned a skeptical lack of confidence. She braced herself not to tremble, closed her palms tightly and put her hands behind her, hiding even that trace of feeling.

"I can prove that his story about you was a lie, Laura."

"His story? But the old negress Josie swore it was true!"

"I can prove it was false, Laura."

"Oh, impossible! She is dead." Laura's smile was not pleasant. "And I have become too accustomed to my peculiar situation to be interested in so-called proofs. Thank you. I understand that you have deserted? No doubt you will now join the Rebels?"

"But, Laura—"

"As for my name, do what you like with it. Good evening. You can see that I am dressed to go!"

"Don't be a fool! Listen!" He spoke hurriedly, afraid she would not listen. "I have proofs acceptable in any court that old Josie lied. Her own affidavit, sworn to and witnessed! Now, what do you say?"

"Pah! She could not read or write."

"But she could talk, my dear! She could and did make her mark before witnesses."

"How long have you known that?" Laura asked coolly, repressing any trace of eagerness.

"Interested now, eh? That is better. My dear, I have known it a long, long time. I always intended it as a wedding present—that is, if you married me. Otherwise, into the fire with it!"

"And you were content that I should be an outcast if I did not marry you?"

"Well, yes, if you insist on putting it that way. You knew I would have died before I let you marry that cad Lanister!"

"Because he once slapped your face when you presumed to speak of me, even with favor? Was that it?"

Terris's pale face reddened. He scowled, glaring, but she appeared to take no notice and idly straightened a bit of lace on her sleeve. When it was smoothed she looked up.

"Well?"

"Laura, listen to me. Val Lanister hired old Josie to tell that story because he did not want to marry you, and there was no other way to avoid it since his father insisted!"

Laura very surprisingly nodded, just a little, quite as if she believed; but she really nodded to mark the shifty discrepancy in Terris's hurried lying.

"But I will burn that paper," he went on slowly, spacing the words for emphasis, "if I do not get ten thousand dollars!"

Laura pointed toward the fireplace, screened with embossed bronze.

"Shall I offer you a match? You might as well ask for the moon. I can give it as easily!"

"Somebody's got to pay it," said Terris, almost snarling. "I am desperate!"

She shrugged her shoulders, and Ter-

ris noticed the shrug rather than the half veiled, searching look in her dark eyes.

"See here, Laura. I know you are more interested than that!"

"But I really am not," she said quickly. "And I can tell you very plainly why. I don't believe there is any such confession. Even if there is, it has no value. Every one would say, 'Forgery!' And that is what I would think of it, too. No, thank you. I prefer to retain my honest shame rather than be suspected of trying to trick people into respecting me."

"No value!" Terris cried. "I tell you it is perfect. I am a lawyer. Do you imagine that I wanted people to think I might be marrying a nigger? I saw to it that her confession was proof."

"*You* saw to it?" Laura paused. "Then you have known a long, long time!" Her eyes seemed to be reading his thoughts. "Old Josie must have confessed to you." Another pause. "And you know you have lied to me about one thing, for if Val Lanister had not wanted to marry me," she said with all the hauteur of Wilamotte pride, "all he needed to do was show the least coldness!"

"But some one, who hated the Lanister family and especially hated Valentine, gave poor old drunken Josie the money to buy her freedom on condition that she would tell that lie. Then—do, please, correct me if I am wrong— Then drowned her so she could never tell the truth!

"Damn it, I loved you, Laura! I still love you. I would have done anything under heaven to keep you from Val Lanister. If you had married me, as I begged you to do, everything would have been all right."

Laura's glance was murderous. His repugnant idea of what made marriage satisfactory caused her flesh to creep. She watched him with the coolness of one who means to do any desperate thing to gain an end.

"All right," he said defiantly. "Have it your way. How much will you give me then?"

"Not a dollar."

"You are lying. You would give your soul! But don't you try to have me found! Don't think because that damned Sherman has posted me as a deserter you can—"

Laura spoke quickly, in anger, but not as if angry at him:

"It doesn't matter how I must feel about what you did, Captain Terris, for after all you did it because you loved me, didn't you?"

"I did, Laura. On my honor, I—"

"Yes, yes. I know. And it wasn't you who made public that story about me, so—"

"No, I have never told!" he said in eagerness, vaguely hopeful.

"—so there is one thing I will do," she went on quickly, in a low voice, moving nearer, her eyes glowing as if with fever. "If you will go join the Rebels—"

"The Rebels! I thought you hated the South!"

"And who in the South do you think I hate most?"

"Oh, I see!" Terris exclaimed doubtfully, almost afraid of what he thought he saw.

"He could be killed in battle," Laura whispered. "And who would know?"

"Yes." Terris also whispered, nodding. "Then what?"

"Anything you ask! I will marry you —sell jewels, beg, borrow, steal, anything!"

"Laura!" He moved toward her with one hand out, but she struck away his hand.

"Do not touch me until you have killed Valentine Lanister!"

"And you will marry me?"

"I swear it." She pointed, urgently. "Now go! Money, myself, everything—yours, if you do that."

When Terris had left the house, Laura ran to the adjoining room and said:

"Rand? Rand! If he sets foot inside

the Rebel lines he will be shot as a spy! Rand? You don't believe I—"

No answer. The room was empty. An open window showed where Rand had made his exit.

CHAPTER XVI

The Sergeant

AS TERRIS was getting into the hack he had kept waiting, a shadow stepped from behind it, clapped him on the shoulder and said—

"Deserter Terris!"

"Deserter! I am no deserter. I am Captain Terris of the Second Vermont, you fool!"

"Too bad I made a mistake, 'cause I sort of stick to my mistakes, yes'r!"

Terris peered closely.

"Ah, Lanister!"

"No, suh! *Corporal* Lanister, chief orderly to General Sherman. I've explained things to the cabman heah, and give him fifty cents out of my pay. So come along. Let's get in."

Rand roughly pushed Terris in, holding to his arm, and sat beside him.

"We'll drive slow and talk things oveh. I've told the driver I would most liable have to shoot you fo' trying to escape. Down where I come from neahly all prisoners get shot—or hung—trying to escape."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Depends."

"I have a fine watch and a little money."

"Yo' have got something worth ten thousand dollars, too!"

"You listened!"

"I tried mighty hard."

"You heard what she said—everything?"

Rand had climbed from the window before the conversation ended, meaning to be ready to follow Terris, but found the hack waiting and spoke to the driver instead.

"I wasn't so much intahested in her talk as youahs," he said with evasion. "And I eitheh get me something worth ten thousand dollars, or yo' are mighty liable to get killed escapin'!"

"See here, Lanister—"

"Corporal!"

"You haven't any love for your Rebel cousin, Corporal."

"You say a word agin him and I'll muss you up a mighty lot."

"Then you didn't hear—" Terris hesitated.

"What was it I didn't heah?"

"You didn't hear me tell her there was no such confession from the old negress. I told her it was—uh—that I was foolin' her."

"So then they ain't no reason at all fo' you not to get shot—escapin'?"

"You wouldn't shoot me in cold blood!"

"I can powerful easy get myself all het up. Then General Sherman will maybe make me a sergeant. He don't like you."

"If I do give you that paper will you let me go?"

"Why talk about what ain't?"

"But if there were?"

"But there ain't!" Rand insisted. "You said so."

"There is. I was lying."

"Sho', I knew that."

"Will you let me go?"

"Go where?"

"Wherever I want to. Free."

"Looky heah, Terris. You put things hind-end to. You are going to try to escape if I don't get it!"

"But if I do give it to you?"

"Then we'll talk some mo'. So hand her oveh!" Rand put out his hand.

"Of course, I haven't it on me!"

"After you try to escape I'll go through youah pockets and make sho' of that!"

"It is in my room."

"At the Marble House?" Rand asked with assurance.

"How did you know?"

"Fo' fifty cents a nigger cabman can tell a lot. He said he got you at the Marble House."

"I don't live there. I was visiting friends."

"Let's go meet youah friends."

"See here, Lanister—"

"Corporal!"

"See here, Corporal. Let's talk this over like men, men of the world. I'm not really a deserter. I am arranging to get a commission in another regiment. I had to leave because Sherman would have made my life hell—"

"You keep on lying to me, and Old Nick'll get that job fo' himself, sudden. I've heard tell he does it fo' eveh and eveh—which is about the size o' youah needs." Rand's solemn drawl was ominous.

"You wouldn't shoot an unarmed man!"

"Them's the safest kind to shoot. General Sherman believes in shooting deserters. Evehthing fits in just right fo' you to get killed—escapin'."

"That cabman will tell that you murdered me."

"Fo' anotheh fifty cents he'll say whateveh I tell him to. An' yo' are a deserter. Keep remembering that!"

THEY drove to the Marble House—a second-class hotel on old Pegram Street. It had a musty smell and was dense with shadows never put to flight by sunlight or the low-burning gas jets. A few worn-out looking persons loitered in chairs near the entrance and, having nothing else to do, stared at Terris, whom they knew by sight, and at Rand whom they mistook for a soldier friend. The more observant thought Mr. Terry—which was the name the deserter had given—was not feeling well.

Upstairs, Terris opened the door, inviting Rand to enter. Rand stepped back, pushing at Terris.

"You get in there."

Terris went in, baulked of his chance to turn and bolt. He struck a match and lighted the gas. All of his self-control was summoned up to say with a friendly air—

"Sit down, Corporal."

Terris dropped his hat on a table and pointed toward a chair near the center of the room. But Rand put his back to the door.

"Do I get it or not?"

"Get what?"

"Thirty dollars fo' taking a deserter back to camp!"

Terris flinched. He did not yet quite believe that Rand would shoot him down; but he did believe that Rand would take him back to camp and that General Sherman would probably court-martial him for cowardice in battle and have him shot for deserting.

"If I give you what you want, what will you do with it?"

"None of youah business."

"Give it to her?" Terris could not rid himself of the conceit that he was much smarter than this raw Westerner.

"Yo' are sho' wastin' youah time!"

"But why do you want it?" Then, with an air of critical sympathy, as if he would like to be of service, "You want her to like you, don't you?"

"You bet. An' she sho' does," said Rand.

"Then you will give it to her?"

"Will I?"

"What do you promise me if I do give it to you?"

"It's easier promisin' what I'll do if you don't!"

"I am not afraid of your threats!" Terris drew himself up, looking defiant.

"I don't care whetheh yo' are or not. On'y you'll prob'ly wish you had been when I get done. I'm going to have that nigger's story. Do I get it befo'e I shoot you? Yes 'r no?"

"You have to promise—"

"You talk too much. On'y promise I make is to shoot if I don't get it." Rand drew his revolver, not leveling it. "I'm going to count three. One. Two." The revolver was leveled. "Th—"

"Don't! Don't! I give up!"

"I knowed you would. So hand it oveh."

Terris hesitated. Rand tilted the

gun's muzzle, saying ominously—

"Yo' had all the warning yo' are going to get!"

Terris reached into his inside coat pocket, took out a folded sheet of heavy parchment and with an angry fling sent it fluttering to the floor.

"You set down in that chair!"

Terris, with eyes watchfully aslant, sat down. There was no chance to jump to the door and run. No chance to snatch at the revolver. Rand cautiously watched him.

"Try any tricks, and you will be tryin' to escape!"

Terris now fully believed he would shoot. Rand knew that he would.

Sherman had made it emphatically understood that the death penalty fitted desertion in war-time. It was to take the generals in the field almost two years to persuade the merciful Lincoln to let them enforce the penalty. Rand, of course, did not know how merciful Lincoln was going to be. Nor did Terris.

But Rand was right in one thing: Deserters might not be shot after they were captured, but they could justifiably be killed while trying to escape.

Rand picked up the paper, spread it under the light and read—or tried to. He was not much good at unfamiliar script, but puzzled out enough to know that it referred to Laura. At the bottom of the page was a heavy cross, and two other names were signed there. He eyed the signatures, remembering the time or two he had been called on to witness illiterate plainsmen's marks. As a witness you didn't know what the paper was about; you just attested the signature.

Rand pushed up his hat, scratched his head, kept an eye on Terris and tried to think. He believed that if Laura got her hands on this she would burn it, just to keep people from thinking that it was a forgery. Maybe the thing was a forgery. If it was not a forgery, and General Beauregard knew about it, then he wouldn't let her be a spy any longer. General Beauregard and General Lanister would know what to think of the paper, especially if they could question Terris, too.

Rand knew very well what he would like to do; and, having scratched his head and frowned thoughtfully at Terris, he grinned, pulled down his hat and nodded. He crossed to the bed, pulled back the coverlet, jerked the slip off a pillow and, hastily folding it, rammed the pillow case down into his trousers.

"What are you doing?" Terris asked.

"Live an' learn," said Rand. "Get on youah hat."

"I'll not go to Sherman's camp!"

"I wouldn't take you back to camp fo' a thousand dollars!"

THEY took a hack to the livery stable. Rand called for his horse and one for Terris, asking for a halter also. Terris tried to hesitate about mounting, wanting promises. The only promise he got was that Rand would send the stable boy for a provost's patrol and turn Terris over as a deserter.

"I'll say you robbed me! You did!"

"And I'll show General Sherman of what I robbed you! Then who'll get hung highest?"

They rode through the town. It was about ten o'clock. Many people and carriages were abroad. Rand kept close alongside Terris.

"You try to bolt, and I'll yank you out of that saddle by the neck!"

When they came among the straggling soldiers at the bridge who were returning from leave to their camps, Terris exclaimed—

"You are taking me back!"

"I ain't."

The provost guard examined Rand's pass respectfully, then asked for Terris's. Rand tapped his belt.

"I'm General Sherman's chief orderly. This fellow in undeh my charge."

"All right, Corporal."

As they rode on, Terris, begging plaintively, tried to remind Rand that it was he who had persuaded Sherman

to visit the prison when Rand was accused of being a spy.

Rand said irritably:

"Terris, what's mostly wrong with you is that yo' think yo' are so much smarter than otheh folks you don't have to tell the truth. But I'll tell you some truth! Both of us is mighty liable to get shot, sudden, befo' morning!"

Rand knew the country, the roads, the camps, the woods. They turned off the main road and Rand dismounted, tied Terris's feet under the horse's belly, put the halter on Terris's horse, and kept hold of it as they rode on.

"Why did you do that?" Terris was discomforted by losing a chance to bolt through the wood in the darkness.

"Amuse youahself trying to figgeh out," Rand suggested.

A sentry on a lonely beat challenged them.

"Friends with the countersign," said Rand.

"Dismount! Advance with the countersign."

"You bet!"

Rand dismounted, quickly loosened the girth of Terris's saddle, then strode up to the sentry. As chief orderly, required to dash about night and day, Rand was given the countersign as regularly as a sergeant of the guard.

The sentry advanced them. Terris came riding up very slowly lest the saddle turn under him and he be left to dangle head down about the horse's feet. Rand had seen that trick worked on prisoners in Texas.

Rand said with offhand casualness—

"Let me tighten youah cinch a little." In the darkness, with his back to the sentry, he tightened the girth.

They rode on until they came to a picket camp. The sergeant greeted Rand and asked questions.

Rand answered them readily, then inquired—

"How far to the Rebs?"

"They got a flag flyin' about three mile over thar. I hear tell Lincoln can see it from the White House."

"Me and him heah are goin' out to have a look."

"Maybe I oughtn't to let you go," said the sergeant. "The lieutenant, he is down the crick—"

"Keepin' a farmer's wife from gittin' lonesome!" a private explained.

"—an' he ort to know about you goin' out!"

"You can stop us if you want." Rand's tone was encouraging. "Save us a long ride in the dark. And tomorrow it'll be you, not me, that explains to the general why we didn't get oveh there!" Rand tapped his belt, looked mysterious, nodded at Terris. "I'm putting him through the lines!"

The sergeant waved a hand.

"Go on. I'll chance it. I know you are Sherman's orderly."

They rode on. Terris tried not to disclose his satisfaction in asking—

"Why are you taking me to the Rebels?"

"Am I?"

Rand pulled the horses to a stop under a tree and broke off a branch. It was not quite straight, but would serve. He reached down inside his trousers and pulled out the pillow case.

"HALT! Who's thah!"

Rand could see the arrested lurch of a silhouetted shape gazing forward into the dimness and reined up with a leisurely, "Whoa-a-oh!" Then he called—

"A couple of en'mies undeh a flag o' truce!" He raised his pillow case like a standard.

"Yo' ahr what?"

"En'mies undeh a flag of truce."

The vedette swore.

"They's mo' gosh blame funny things happen in this heah wahr. Co'p'l the guard! Pos' Numbah Two!"

The call was taken up as if by a strong echo, ringing out when a second sentry, some two hundred feet away, repeated it. The corporal, with a man or two at his heels, appeared and sang out—

"Who the hell ahr yo' all?"

Rand told him. He was ordered to dismount and advance. He did, under his pillow case.

"I got business with General Lanister and General Beauregard!"

"General Beaugahd!" The corporal peered, frowned and blinked. "Yo' tryin' to be sma'ht?"

"No, suh! You just ask him."

"Easieh fo' to ask God A'mighty an' git an answeh, too. How many is they of yo' all?"

"Just me and him. Come on up heah, Terris!"

Terris rode up at a slow walk, very slow, sitting with uneasy balance, his fingers clamped to the horse's mane. He said at once, loudly and with feeling—

"Men, I am a Southern sympathizer and this man—" He was trying to make things bad for Rand.

"Ahr yo' all desertin'?" The corporal asked it with the air of a man who has at last guessed the puzzling answer.

"Not me, I ain't!" Rand flourished his pillow case. "This is a flag o' truce and—"

The flourishes of the pillow case made Terris's horse shy. Terris squawked, clutched wildly. Rand caught the horse's head and spoke in a soothing voice. The horse was a gentle old stable hack. The corporal and his men helped Terris to dismount.

The lieutenant of the picket outpost, aroused by the commotion, came on the run.

"What's the matteh, men?"

"Howdy," said Rand, moving his flag, wanting it noticed.

"Officer!" Terris pushed close. "This damned Yank has—"

"Silence!" The very young lieutenant had the bark of a colonel. "Now you, Yank! What's the meaning of this?"

Rand spoke up, earnestly.

"Him heah, suh, he was a captain in the 69th New York, but deserted. Shaved his whiskers and run. Been hiding there in Washington. Me, I'm General Sherman's orderly. Just tonight I learned it was him heah that ruined the name of a fine lady down in New Orleans by making folks think maybe she was a nigger! So I just up and brought him along oveh heah fo' General Lanister and General Beauregard to talk to. They know the lady and her folks. That's how 'tis, suh!"

No amount of artfulness and untruths could so well have won the sympathy of the haughty lieutenant and these lean-limbed backwoods soldiers. Even if he was a Yank, the chivalry of his purpose moved them.

"But you are Southern!" said the lieutenant, noticing Rand's accent.

"My family it split, suh," said Rand simply. "But when it comes to wipin' the disgrace off a lady, I'm—"

"A real lady?" the lieutenant asked, earnestly.

"Yes, suh! Her folks are friends of General Lanister and General Beauregard."

"If I knew that was true," said the youth under shoulder straps, "I would run you through like a dog, sir!" He laid his hand on his sword and stepped toward Terris.

"It's a lie!" Terris shouted. "I wanted to clear her name! I'm a Southern sympathizer. That's why I deserted from the—"

"Why did you eveh join them?"

"I—they got me drunk. I was coming over here to enlist when—"

"Then why are yo' complaining, sir?" said the lieutenant. "Yo' are now in Confederate lines!"

The lieutenant sent them behind the lines to his colonel, who was a tall, polished gentleman, meticulous of manner, gray-haired and dignified. He sat by candlelight in his tent and looked with grave amusement at Rand's pillow case.

"And you, sir," he asked, "are trying to make your way to General Beauregard to clear the name of a lady? General Beauregard is about twenty miles from here."

"I don't care if he's two hund'ed,

suh!" Rand flourished his flag.

The colonel smiled gravely.

"Under ordinary circumstances, sir, we could not accept that flag of truce. However, sir, if you are telling the truth —and I am sure you are—I can promise that the flag will be respected, sir, throughout the Confederate army!"

THE colonel sent them to his brigadier. The brigadier was stout, red faced, with chin whiskers and violent language. He was aroused from bed and swore luridly. The moment Rand started to talk, the brigadier shook an arm overhead and called all of heaven's host to witness that he was not going to be taken in by any cock-and-bull Yankee trick. The brigadier did the talking. He damned the colonel's men for letting Rand and Terris move behind the lines without being blindfolded, and flourished his pudgy arm at Rand's pillow case.

"That rag means nothing! Any damn coward, sir, could tie his dirty drawers to a stick and be undeh a flag of truce!"

Rand said nothing, looked respectful, was attentive, and furtively tucked the pillow case under his arm.

Terris, happy at hearing Rand cursed, spoke up— "But, General, sir, I am a Southern sympathizer and—"

The brigadier turned on him.

"Yo' ahr a liah! That, suh, is what eveh damn spy says—the fust thing he says! So yo' ahr a liah!" The brigadier stamped his foot. The slipper flew off. "Henahry, yo' damn loafer, you!"

"Yas, suh, Gen'l, yas, suh!"

"Bring my boots!"

"Yas, suh, Gen'l!"

A negro boy came out of the next room, nervous with haste but grinning. So Rand guessed that the brigadier's bark was worse than his bite.

The general sat down and started to pull on his boots, but Terris said very earnestly—

"I am not a spy and—"

The general bounced up, shaking his fist with the boot in it.

"You call me a liah, suh! I say yo' ahr a spy, by God! This man—" he swept the boot toward Rand—"is at least in unifohm. But you, yo' low-lived Yankee liah, yo' ahr a spy!"

Terris leaned forward like a man playing his last and best card.

"I can prove I am not by giving you information about the army and fortifications at Washington!"

"Who the hell wants youah info'mation!" roared the brigadier. "We've got eveh thing but the Yank's muster roll and could have that too if— Why, damn my soul! I heahby hasten to apologize, suh, to all the spies that have eveh been hung! Yo' ahr a *traitor!* A spy, suh, is a gentleman of honoh to a man that will sell his country, even if that country is a niggah-lovin' land o' mudsills and wooden nutmegs, suh!"

"He's Southern!" Terris stabbed a finger at Rand. "And a Yankee—a traitor to the South! General Lanister is his uncle."

The brigadier examined Rand and asked—

"Is General Lanister youah uncle, boy?" He held his breath, swelling visibly as if about to explode.

Rand stood ready to dodge the boot and said—

"Yes, suh!"

The brigadier exploded with:

"Then why the hell didn't yo' say so? General Lanister, suh, I am proud to say, is my friend. Bless my granny's bones! So yo' ahr the boy that rode around all oveh our lines du'ing the battle? Damn me, suh, it took a Suthuhn boy to do that. Henahry!"

"Yas, suh, Gen'l."

"Tell Captain Dillis I want him!" The brigadier glowered at Terris. "Who is this man, boy?"

"He made folks down in New Orleans think a mighty fine lady had been changed in her cradle fo' a white nigger's child, so . . ."

Captain Dillis appeared. He was young, neat, erect.

"Dillis, take these men to General Beauregard. The corporal heah is undeh a flag of truce, suh, and will receive all the consideration of an hon'able enemy, suh. The otheh, suh, is the lowest animal that eveh crawled on its belly into God's holy sunlight from Yankeedom!"

ABOUT four o'clock in the morning they reached the house where General Beauregard had his headquarters. Captain Dillis and his spur-clattering escort passed the sentries on the veranda and entered the great hall where a young assistant-adjutant came forward inquiringly.

"Sent to headquarters by order of General Wayne, sir," said Captain Dillis and, indicating Terris, added, "General Wayne is inclined to believe that this man is a suspected person and—"

The young assistant-adjutant put on his best military air, stepped nearer to Terris and asked—

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am a Southern sympathizer and have been most barbarously abused! I demand to see General Beauregard! I want to enlist in the Southern army."

"Your name?"

"Terris, sir. William Harrison Terris. I have lived in the South and—"

The young assistant-adjutant's face took on the look of a man who wonders if he is awake. He blinked in amazement, then turned toward Captain Dillis and slowly began to smile. The smile spread into a laughing shout.

"I'll be damned!"

He pulled the astounded Terris into the lamplight, peered at the scar on his forehead; then he grabbed Terris's left hand and scrutinized a black pinhead mole near the thumb joint.

"By heaven, sir!" he cried joyfully to Captain Dillis, and held up a hand. "See my inky fingers? I was just copying out descriptions of this man to be distributed to every brigade commander in the morning. Not an hour ago a messenger from Washington came through with urgent warning to be on the watch for this spy who would try to enlist."

"Spy! Spy?" Terris leaned forward, a little dazed and imploring. "I am not a spy. I never dreamed of being a spy!"

"Why, you told me yourself that you wanted to enlist!" said the assistant-adjutant. "Bless good old Wayne! Now I don't have to copy out any more descriptions. Sergeant, put this man under guard and kill him if he tries to escape."

"There is a mistake—a terrible mistake!" Terris groaned as if being smothered. He pressed his hand to his pale face, and sweat dripped between the fingers. "Oh Lord, on my honor, sir, a mistake—"

"Ha, on your part, yes!" said the adjutant with satisfaction. "We know all about you. Captain in the 69th New York, but were posted as a deserter so we would be the more ready to believe you wanted to join our army! Ha! Ha! Take him away, Sergeant!"

"Come along!" The sergeant jerked him about.

Terris staggered forward, one hand groping as if for support, the other pressed against his face. He tried to turn and plead, but the sergeant caught him by the collar and pushed him along. Men with bayonets followed at his heels.

"Now," said the young adjutant, ready for further triumph as he came up to Rand, "Who are you? What are you doing here in that blue-belly uniform and with that white rag on a stick?"

Rand caught his breath.

"This is purt-neah too much fo' me!"

Captain Dillis spoke up.

"General Wayne signified his wish that this man should be treated with consideration. He is, I believe, in some way responsible for the capture of that spy."

"Ah!" The adjutant was at once favorable, but mystified.

"I've got to see General Beauregard," said Rand.

"In the morning. The general has been much disturbed tonight."

"You'd betteh let me see him." Rand tried to look important.

"What about, sir?" The adjutant was important, too.

"Something private."

"I must know the nature of it before I can presume to disturb the general." Rand looked about with caution, stepped toward the adjutant, rose to tiptoes and whispered:

"It's about his spy in Washington. Miss Laura Lorraine—Willamotte."

"Has anything happened?" the adjutant exclaimed uneasily.

"You just betteh bet something's happened!"

RAND entered General Beauregard's room. The general, handsome and erect, then only about thirty-five, stood in a dressing gown beside the table where a shaded lamp threw its light over papers, all neatly arranged. The pale glow of dawn was at the windows.

Rand strode in with assurance and stopped short, grinning.

General Beauregard eyed him keenly, wondered at his blue uniform, frowned in bewilderment at the white pillow case on a stick and searched his memory to place that tanned, blue eyed, muscular face.

"Ah! *Now* what are you up to?" The tone was cautiously unfriendly.

"Tell him to get out!" Rand waggled the flag of truce at the adjutant.

Beauregard gestured slightly in dismissal. The adjutant gasped. General Beauregard was a gracious gentleman, but nobody in the army presumed to treat him with brusk familiarity. Yet this Yankee corporal was giving orders.

"He carries sidearms, sir!" the adjutant pointed, apprehensive.

"But don't you see, Lieutenant, we meet under a flag of truce?" said the general with a fine intonation of sarcasm.

Rand flapped a hand at the adjutant, hurrying him. He withdrew in wonder, giving Rand a last long look as he pulled the door shut.

"Now?" Beauregard's brown eyes were keenly observant and steady, somehow less friendly than Rand had hoped.

"I don't know what's happened," Rand blurted. "Nobody knew I was bringing that fellow Terris, yet you all were laying fo' him."

The general nodded. His long fingers softly tapped the table. He asked—

"How did you happen to bring him?"

"Well, sir, General, it was this away. I knew Miss Laura was going to get caught fo' being youah spy, so—"

"You knew what?"

"Sho'ly. General Sherman and a lot of people think she is youah spy, and I know blame well she is. So I thought—" Rand paused, fumbling for words.

"Before sunrise I may have you shot!" Beauregard, always dramatic, pointed toward the window where dawn glimmered. His voice was stern, his tone cold. He spoke rapidly. "That white flag, unless advanced under the orders of your commanding officer, is nothing but a token of surrender! You are known to be a Union spy. And though at present in uniform, you have yet to answer for having disguised yourself as a Confederate officer and given false orders to my soldiers during a battle! And what have you to say, sir, when I tell you that your presence here now is merely a daring ruse to get me to repose confidence in a woman who, since you are her friend, is therefore a person I should distrust?"

The general's rapid, incisive words confused Rand, and the entangling logic left him groping so that he wrinkled his forehead in trying to think. Then Rand settled back, his head up, and declared:

"You know doggone well you trust her! I can't he'p what you think about me, but I come down heah and drug Terris along so you and General Lanister would know what to think about her. 'Twas him started that story in

New Orleans about Miss Laura being a nigger—"

Beauregard, distrustful and wary, watched closely, weighing every word.

"—so I just brung him down heah. Nobody knew I was doing it. Didn't know it myself till we started. But you all was laying fo' him!"

"She knew you were coming. She gave you a pass, didn't she?"

"No," said Rand bluntly. "She didn't, I told you! This heah is all the pass I had." He shook his flag of truce. "And if I was trying to play any tricks, yo' can be doggone sho' I wouldn't want you to get a look at me! And I'm going tell you how it was, just from the start. There in New Orleans, my uncle give me a pass. Well, I didn't no sooner set foot in Washington than—"

Rand talked rapidly, pouring out the words, pausing to catch deep breaths and going on again until out of breath.

"—Old Bill made her think I was a Southern spy 'r something, so that's why she he'ped get me out of jail. That night when I went to tell her 'I'm obliged', Major Clarky come busting in, like a drunk Injun . . . So, 'cause he thought I was a spy, he thought she was one too fo' he'ping me get out o' jail.

"After he was dead she said I'd sho' get hung if I didn't make a bee-line South, and she said fo' me to come heah and tell you just what happened. That's how I knowed Clarky was dead right in saying she was youah spy . . . Me and Bill toted off Clarky's body. One day Terris fell off his hoss with a foot in a stirrup and I—General Sherman asked me questions that showed he thought she was a spy, but I wiggled out. I wouldn't tell him lies; first place, he's most liable to catch you. But besides, I like 'im!

"I told Miss Laura to look out, but she don't scare easy . . . I been in an awful pickle 'cause I know she is a spy; I know they're going to catch her. I know she ought to be caught, but I'd give my neck to keep her from getting caught! Tonight I went to tell her plain General Sherman would get her, sho'! And he will, too.

"Terris come in—wanted her to pay him money fo' a paper he said would prove she wasn't a nigger. She up and said she wouldn't give 'im a dollar. Didn't believe in his old paper. Said she'd ratheh be thought a nigger than have people think may be she'd play tricks to make 'em think she wasn't. Me, I was all excited. Folks ain't got no business thinking that of her. Why, she's living now with a Mrs. Margate whose child she is supposed to be and won't tell 'cause she says evehbody in the South knows if she was Mrs. Margate's child, Mrs. Margate would lie like hell.

"I crept out of the window and laid fo' Terris. Heah's the paper I took off him tonight. He didn't want Valentine to marry her, so he give that old nigger nurse money to get free so she'd start that story. Then he made her swear it was all a lie so that if Miss Laura married him instead of Val he could prove she was white. And he drowned the nigger woman so she couldn't eveh tell on him.

"I come down heah to make you and my uncle know Miss Laura is white as anybody eveh was, but you purt-neah scairt me out of a year's growth the way you talked about me being a spy and I almos' forgot what I come fo'!"

Rand's breath gave out. He had to stop, but sucked in another deep breath, ready to go on talking.

GENERAL BEAUREGARD had listened and watched without the twitch of an eyelid to disclose what he thought. In silence he took the parchment-like paper, stooped to the glow of the shaded lamp and read carefully.

He interrupted his reading to sit down and take up a pen. He wrote rapidly, sealed the note with wax and called for an orderly.

The door opened instantly. A trim orderly stood there. Also the young as-

sistant-adjutant who had lingered, anxious and curious.

"Neveh mind, Orderly. It was the lieutenant I wanted." The orderly withdrew. General Beauregard gave the sealed note to his adjutant. "See that this is delivered with the least possible delay. Extremely urgent."

When the door was closed again, General Beauregard said:

"I have just sent instructions for Miss Willamotte to leave Washington at once and report here. And I shall detain you until she arrives, which will probably be tomorrow morning, or late tonight. So sit down, Corporal."

Beauregard went on reading and rereading the paper. Rand sat down and wiped his face with the pillow case, breathed deeply and gazed at the dawn. He absently fingered his chevrons, realizing now that he was not likely to be a corporal when he returned to camp. He had already overstayed his leave.

The door opened. Miss Laura, unannounced, entered hurriedly. Her habit was dusty with hard riding. She held an opened note in her hand. The broken seal of wax dangled on the paper's edge.

"General," she said gaily, "your order to come at once to headquarters! Am I not prompt?"

Laura stopped and drew back, shrinking.

"Rand!" Her quick look searched General Beauregard's face. "General! Rand has told you that—but it isn't true! I wanted to make Terris come into our lines to be captured and treated as a spy! Oh, you must believe me!" She was almost in tears.

"My dear Laura," said Beauregard, "Terris has been captured. And he is likely to be treated as something more than a spy!"

"Terris captured? Already? Rand? You have told what I said to get him to come and join our army?"

"I didn't heah that. Reckon I'd already climbed out o' the window to lay fo' him."

"Your friend, the corporal here," said Beauregard, with approval and a little amused, "merely had some matters of a personal nature to talk over with me. He brought Terris along with him, ran the lines of two armies, arrived at headquarters at four o'clock this morning and demanded that I get up and talk with him, alone. In fairness, I must admit that I am glad I did."

"Rand!" she exclaimed, happy but bewildered.

"And I sent at once for you, Laura. You are no longer attached to the Confederate Secret Service because—"

"Rand! Then you *did* hear what I said to Terris! General, that is why you do not longer trust me?"

"Laura," said Beauregard with kindly rebuke, "you gave me trustworthy information about everything but your own dangers. I had no idea that you were suspected by any one in Washington. If Tecumseh Sherman suspects you—" General Beauregard flipped his hand gracefully—"you may be willing to continue the risk, but I am not. I know that man!" He held out the parchment-like paper. "This will interest you, Laura. A most amazing war, ours! Enemies risk their necks to do little personal favors for one another." Plainly, that aspect of the war was pleasing to the gallant Beauregard.

Laura read and looked up almost timidly, as if afraid of the answer.

"Does this tell—is it really proof of—of something?"

Beauregard tossed his hand with quick, characteristic grace.

"Absolutely!" He was not going to trifle with possible doubts. "Terris is going back to New Orleans to stand trial, with this as evidence. We will let everybody know who inspired, and why, that dastardly story."

"Rand!" Laura said passionately grateful things, and he fidgeted uncomfortably, even if pleased.

"What brought you here, just when you were wanted?" Beauregard asked.

"Oh!" She looked startled, as if unpleasantly reminded. "General, please,

you must believe me!"

"I never in my life have doubted you—except," he added, smiling, "for one very small moment when I suspected just a little that you and the corporal here had connived to bring Terris to me. But after listening to Corporal Lanister, I had no doubt!"

"Oh, no, you must never think that, General Beauregard! In my desperation to make Terris go where I could have him punished—" she crumpled the parchment-like paper—"for this, I said that if he would come here and—and—"

Her glance wavered.

"I can't repeat it! I am too ashamed to even repeat it!" Her voice broke. She got back her self-control, lifted her head and spoke in little more than a whisper, but with resolution. "He doesn't know I love the South. I said what I knew would make him come! That if he would come here, enlist and k-kill Valentine Lanister that I would marry him!"

General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, who understood women, smiled slightly.

"I at once sent my message to you, General, with his description. And you know how terribly urgent I was that he be caught! But I became so fearful of what I had done, so terribly afraid that he might not be caught, that I came myself to tell you everything and beg you to send Captain Valentine Lanister away from the Army until Terris was captured."

"Gosh a'mighty!" said Rand, astounded at what women would do.

"That was a dangerous game, Laura. Dangerous." General Beauregard waved a hand. His reproof was very like commendation. "Twice recently your personal feelings have influenced you into unmilitary actions. Both times you were fortunate, even if unwise. First, you took a solicitious interest in our young enemy here, which was wrong. Next, you used too great a hazard in trying to have the man Terris caught. I am pleased at both mistakes. But they were, nevertheless, mistakes." He shook his head in friendly severity.

"I've got to be going," said Rand, abruptly.

"One moment, Corporal. Since you came to me under a flag of truce, I must see that you are properly conducted beyond our lines and—"

THE door was flung open with violence. General Beauregard's volunteer aide-de-camp, Captain Valentine Lanister, often spoken of as the best dressed soldier in the army, rushed in. From childhood Beauregard had been his friend. Valentine cried—

"General, that dog Terris has just told me—"

Valentine stopped as if stunned, seeing Laura and, in the uniform of a Yankee corporal, Rand.

Beauregard spoke sharply,

"Captain Lanister, sir!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did not know you were not alone."

Valentine drew himself up. His face became pale except for the reddening of the faint scar on the side of his face. He hesitated in confusion, saluted, faced about and strode toward the door.

"Captain Lanister, sir!" General Beauregard was the most gracious of men, but he could take the skin off a man's ears when he wanted.

Valentine faced about promptly and saluted.

"You were saying something about the prisoner, Terris?"

"Yes, sir."

"Continue!"

"When I heard that he was held as a spy, I went right over to see him. He told me, sir—" Valentine stopped. "Sir, I think I should be permitted to tell you in private!"

"Quite unnecessary, I am sure, Captain. I suspect that Terris merely told you that Miss Laura here said she would marry him if he would come behind our lines and kill you. Is that it?" The general nodded. "All of which is

quite true."

Valentine looked as if he thought the floor unsteady, the walls wobbling. He stared in such an angry daze that his eyes lost focus.

"Anything else, Captain?"

Valentine seemed to have lost the faculty of speech. He drew himself up and stood rigid as if turned to stone. His throat was so tight he could hardly speak.

"He tried to make me promise to help him escape in exchange for the confession that—"

"That it was he who inspired, arranged and perpetrated that story relative to Miss Laura's birth. Did he by chance admit that he murdered the negress Josie?"

"No, sir."

"Quite unnecessary that he should. A Louisiana jury will hang him high as Haman for such a libel, and consider authorship of the libel as circumstantial proof of the murder. As I do myself. I presume you believe Terris's confession?"

"I can not believe—" Valentine looked at Laura and would not go on.

"Of course not, Captain! No one can believe that. We all know that she intended nothing of the kind. You may inquire of Miss Willamotte herself."

Valentine struggled with himself. Beauregard was his ideal of what a soldier should be, and if General Beauregard held Laura blameless for what she had said to Terris, no possibility of doubt remained to even such a touchy, proud young gentleman as himself. Laura smiled, offering her hand. Humbleness came upon his face. In an attitude of pleading he caught her, clung to her, and she clung to him.

Rand grinned and muttered:

"'Just smile a little and shake my head!' Doggone women, they are curious!"

Laura protested, blushing—

"Rand, how dare you!"

His grin widened.

"I ain't complaining. I'm learnin'!"

"Rand!" She turned on him, caught him. "Rand, you have no sister but me, and I am going to kiss you!"

"No, you ain't!" He backed off, pushing at her and eyeing Valentine. "He hates me enough as 'tis, now!"

"Valentine?" She faced him with tender reproach, pleading.

Valentine was having the fight of his life—with himself. He knew very well that Rand had acted honorably on the plantation in telling Judith and General Lanister that he was going North. He knew, too, that Rand had shot at his horse, not at him, that day at Silliker's when his own intentions had been murderous. And he also knew that Rand could safely have killed him among Colonel Reed's Mississippians. He owed Rand gratitude and apologies. His pride was like steel, but steel snaps. Valentine's pride broke. He put out his hand.

LATE that afternoon Rand, with an air of coming on duty quite as if nothing had happened, appeared at General Sherman's headquarters.

"Where have you been, Corporal?" asked the adjutant.

"Me? Oh, I've been on leave."

"Oh, have you?" said the adjutant, sarcastically.

A few minutes later Sherman's voice snapped—

"Orderly!"

Rand entered promptly, with an extra effort to look soldierly.

Sherman sat in a chair with his feet on a table, a sheaf of papers in his hand and a freshly lighted cigar in his mouth. The young clerical aide, pen in hand, looked up with disapproval at Rand. Sherman scanned him from boot toes to hat crown. Rand was neat and clean.

"Jim, smell his breath," said the general.

The clerical aide gave the general a look of protest, sighed, put down his pen and approached Rand. He sniffed cautiously, looked surprised, sniffed again,

almost as if about to kiss Rand; then, with extreme reluctance, announced—

"He hasn't been drinking, sir."

"Rand, where the blazing hell have you been?"

Rand looked at the clerical aide, looked at Sherman and hesitated.

"Jim," said the alert Sherman, "trot over to Colonel Watson, present my compliments, and tell him I want to see him in about fifteen minutes."

"Yes, sir."

The clerical aide smoothed his hair, took off his paper cuffs, got into his coat, put on his hat carefully, smoothed the coat, forcibly straightened his shoulders and strode out with the air of one chosen to show officers how they should carry themselves.

Sherman eyed Rand and demanded—

"Where have you been?"

"I just went across to have a little talk with General Beauregard."

The sheaf of papers flew in all directions. Sherman's feet came off the table. His back-tilted chair struck the floor. His feet banged on the floor as he sprang up, towering and furious.

"Damn your insolence! When I ask a question I want an answer and no smart aleck reply! Where have you been?"

Rand settled back on his heels with his head up.

"I went through the lines fo' a little talk with General Beauregard. And had it!"

Sherman glared. He bit his cigar in two, chewed on half of it and then sucked rapidly on the other half. He eyed the fire-tip, peered with eyes aslant at Rand, walked across the room, flung half the cigar at a spittoon, jerked a fresh one from his pocket and lighted it. He sat down, tilted back his chair, raised his long legs to the table and said:

"All right, go on! Go on. Tell me about it!"

Rand told it—all of it—everything.

". . . and I come back, meaning fo' to tell you and take whateveh is a-coming to me. I've told you, and I'm ready to catch hell!"

"And you'll sure as hell catch it!" Sherman exclaimed as he stood up, furious.

He glared at Rand, then began to pace back and forth across the room, swearing at times. He cleared his throat as if to speak, but frowned and rumpled his hair. Then, explosively:

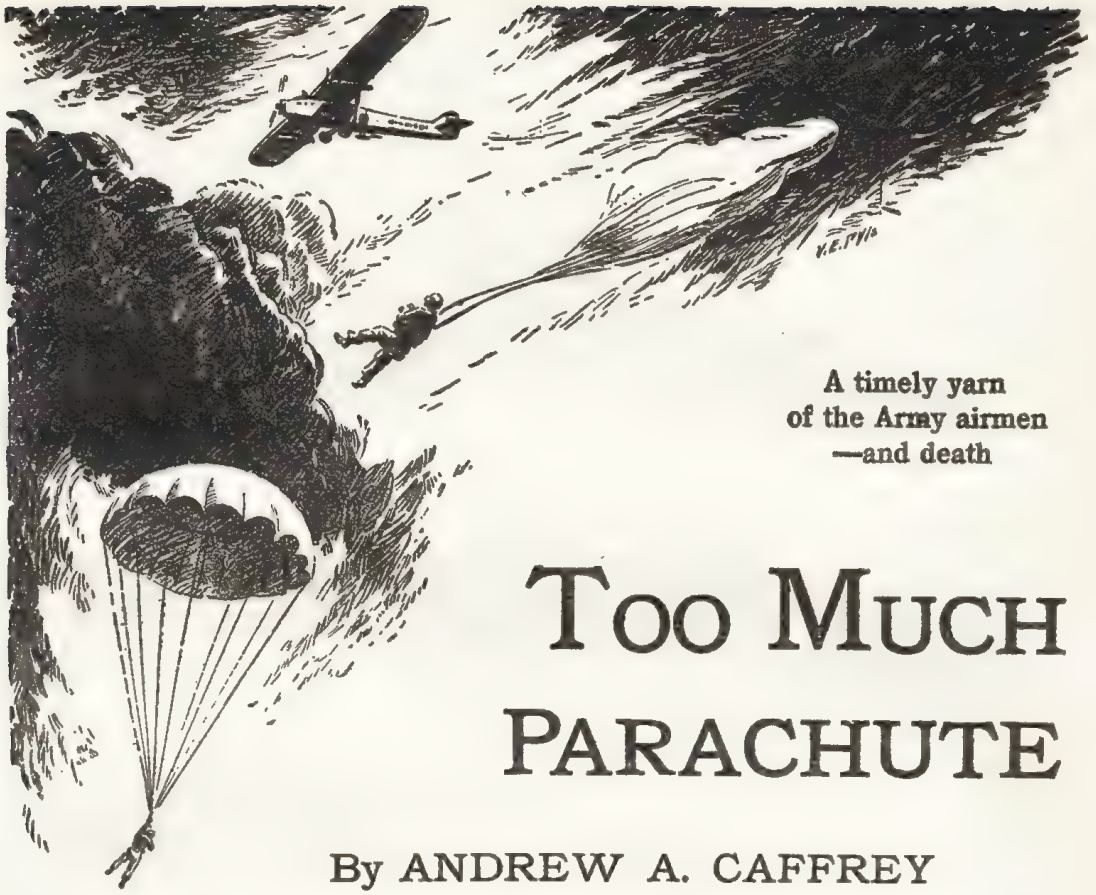
"Damn me, if I know what to do with you! You ought to be shot, hanged, drawn and quartered, boiled in oil, thrown to the dogs! Since war first began and cavemen threw rocks at one another, a thing just like this never happened! Never! You had no business to care that—" Sherman snapped his thumb and finger—"whether she was a nigger or not, or who believed it!

"Terrible thing though! Terrible thing for a girl—Southern girl! I can't blame you. But nobody in the Army will believe you are telling the truth, or oughtn't to be shot if you are! See here, you young idiot! War is war! You can't go trotting through lines to—I've simply got to have you court-martialed, or—or—I ought to be court-martialed myself if I don't.

"Damn your soul! Any other man would have deserted, but to top and compound it all, you come in here and put your commanding officer in the devil of a mess by telling him the truth, instead of saying you were drunk! I don't know what to do with you, you young idiot! I can't take the responsibility of letting you off, even if I—I— I'll be damned if I ever punish one of my soldiers for downright gallantry to the enemy!

"I'm going to President Lincoln himself and tell him. If he don't hang you, then nobody can. I'll tell him everything you've told me and that I believe every word of it. But for a thing like that, you've simply got to be court-martialed—or promoted! By the Lord, I'll risk it. Get to hell out of here and go sew sergeant's stripes on your arm!"

THE END



A timely yarn
of the Army airmen
—and death

Too Much Parachute

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

THAT'S what Colonel Justice said was wrong with Air Corps. He was in command at May Field, California. Three times in two months, for a grand total of fourteen jumps, officers and crews of May Field bombers had abandoned ship. That's a lot o' 'chute jumping.

"Too damned much parachute!" said Colonel Justice. "Three ships—at $65,000 each. I don't say that some, or even all, of these jumps have not been justified, but— Well, what have you gentlemen to say on the subject?"

Captain Force, officer in charge of flying at May, then said his say. He defended the parachute. His viewpoint, oft presented, was that all the ships in the sky—even at $65,000 a throw—are not of as much value as one man's life. Force's talk was good, too. But it was all old stuff, and Colonel Justice remained unshaken in his too-much-parachute position. He stared at Force.

"I repeat," he said among other things, "I am not insinuating that some of these jumps have not been justified. But I will ask you to recall the scores and scores of wartime pilots who put fire-ships down to safe landings. And they brought in ships that had ailerons shot away. Ships with rudder-bars kicked off the fittings. Ships with struts and wing sections missing. Ships with propellers shattered, casseroles gone and motors shaken loose. Ships with wheels off. Ships with linen gone. Ships with blood dripping through the floorboards. Ships, set down safely, with men on the controls who would be dead before the bus stopped rolling at the deadline. Ships that were manned by boys who were building a tradition!"

Going out from that meeting, Captain Force stopped atop the steps to think and light a cig. Lieutenant Meeker, a

newcomer at May, hesitated at Force's side to say:

"Captain, you told 'im! You sure showed the Old Man where to set 'er down and roll to a stop, eh?"

"Let's get this right, Lieutenant," said Force. "I didn't *tell* or *show* Colonel Justice anything. Any man at May can—"

"But your argument when he—"

"Argument!" emphasized Captain Force. "There was no *argument*. Gentlemen *discuss* points of opinion. The commanding officer is open to conviction; and when he says too much parachute he means, and believes, just that. By the way, you're making that San Diego hop, aren't you? The ships are getting under way—better hurry."

Lieutenant Meeker flew south with his flight. Captain Hall was leading that five-ship formation of bombers. Their mission was an afternoon's round trip to and from San Diego. A couple or three hours should have seen it washed out, but a heavy windstorm put all five ships to the job of bucking the breeze coming back. The wind was a hot and sandy blow right off the Mohave Desert; and Southern California knows no worse weather. Visibility went out completely. Captain Hall signaled his four following ships to break formation and cut for home as best they might.

Lieutenant Meeker found himself pretty much alone in that dusty sky—and mighty glad that he and his three shipmates were sitting on 'chutes. Maybe they'd have to use them. One, two and three hours of flying time went by for Meeker, and still no May Field. That was bad. The storm was getting worse.

Finally, when just about all hope had gone, Meeker topped the storm and located the 11,485-foot crest of Mount San Gorgonio, about twenty-five miles east of May. With San Gorgonio as a marker, Meeker went back into the storm and located Forest Homes, about six miles to the west. That's high in the mountains, too. And it was there that Lieutenant Meeker told his three shipmates to jump.

Then, to keep his pilotless ship from spreading death in some valley town, Meeker went back to San Gorgonio. Heading said ship for the tough mountainside, Meeker kissed the bus goodby and jumped. Good headwork there!

Fate was to play a nasty trick on Lieutenant Meeker. That big craft, robbed of its crew, didn't crash its $65,000 self against the tough side of Mount San Gorgonio. Instead, that bomber ghosted over and around the mountain, then flew back into the valley, came up into the north wind again and made a perfect landing within five miles of May Field!

It so followed that Meeker's crew—Second-Lieutenant King, Sergeant Poor and Corporal Prettyman—all landed safely, via parachute, near Forest Homes. They reported back at May Field after sunset.

Meeker spent the night wandering on the side of San Gorgonio; and the big bomber, flown home from its self-chosen field, arrived back at May before its pilot. Needless to say, there was much laughing being done—but not by Lieutenant Meeker. He was pretty sore.

NEXT morning, limping badly, Meeker answered officers' call. At that meeting Colonel Justice spoke of just about everything that has to do with the daily life of a flying post, but he made no mention of storms, bombers, pilots or parachutes. And for Lieutenant Meeker, that was hard to take; for he was all made up for a blow-off, should the subject be brought up for discussion.

The meeting ended, and Captain Force strolled out. Again he stopped atop the steps to light a smoke. Once more Meeker hesitated to talk.

"Well, Captain," said Meeker, "I was all set to hear one hell of a lot about too much parachute. Wonder why the Old Man failed to take the easy opener, eh?"

Captain Force pulled a few slow drags on a new cig and snapped the dead match on to the sand-drifted grass of what, a few days ago, had been a lawn. He asked—

"Why should the commanding officer talk of parachutes?"

Force spoke slowly, deliberately, with the well chosen words that an officer in charge of flying should use, knowing full well that such an officer shouldn't say too much—nor yet too little—on matters official or semiofficial.

"After all, Lieutenant Meeker," he added, "little, perhaps, remains to be said. You know that old one about *repetition for emphasis.* You wouldn't —or at least, I wouldn't—expect Colonel Justice to repeat and emphasize just for the sake of rubbing it in. Why not leave well enough alone, eh?"

"But I did the right thing, in spite—"

"Guess you did," said Captain Force, slowly swaying, stiff-legged, down the few steps, away from the acrid Meeker. "We still have a firstrate craft in bomber No. 2."

Meeker took that right on the chin. What else could he do? A captain's a captain, in any man's branch of the Army, and a loot's only a loot. Yes, sir, if you're only a loot, you'll take it and learn to like it.

However, that wasn't all that Lieutenant Meeker took during the days and weeks that followed. Any Army post, as they'll tell you, is just one great big family. What's more, she's just one great big hell of a rough family, too. And especially when she sits down to enjoy her meals. Officers' mess is no exception, so Feeker suffered the well known ribbing there.

But that wasn't all. Enlisted men, you must know, are out for their fun. The enlisted stiffs are the kind of guys who flop flat on their bunks, stare at the ceiling and compose ribald songs and ditties about the epic happenings of the Service. It followed that Lieutenant Meeker found himself the moving theme of such a piece of incidental music.

The lilting aria was, of course, to the tune of "Casy Jones"; and it had to do with a flying man who stepped out on the edge of a cloud—for a purely personal reason—and his doggone plane went right along home. As the musical days passed, the new song took unto itself an ever-increasing trail of added verses. Meeker heard macs singing it, heads down and feet up in cockpits, as they worked. Guards, walking post through the long night, were adding to it. Cooks and K.P.'s on duty in the several kitchens of May Field were tacking on new and better versions in verse. And even the maintenance gang, collecting garbage and drumming the G.I's in tune, told all about the flying man, with his orders in his hand, taking to the silk, deserting his can.

Strange to say, the thing worked an oil-on-water effect on Lieutenant Meeker. It wasn't that he learned to like it, but that he contrived to take it. He seemed to lose his bellicosity. No longer did he haunt the flying office and Flying Officer Force. And the Old Man's slogan—too much parachute—was now unmentioned by Lieutenant Meeker. For sure, the gang had worn him down.

Then Captain Force sent for Lieutenant Meeker, the flying-office orderly advising the lieutenant that the time was now. He climbed down from his ship, having been all set to take off, and went directly to flying office, wondering what the orderly meant by now.

"I just watched you climb aboard your ship, Lieutenant," Captain Force said. "Fact is, I also saw you come in and climb down from this morning's patrol. Hell, Lieutenant, I'm getting to be a regular watchdog, eh? Anyway, Lieutenant," Force continued, getting down to the business at hand, "this is what I want to take up with you. You're not wearing a 'chute."

Lieutenant Meeker pulled a pack of cigs, very slowly, from his pocket. His face was slowly bleaching with anger and he was silent. He drew one cig-

from the deck, struck a flame, then dragged, all the while fighting for control.

"Parachute!" he mumbled. "Dammit, Captain Force, do we have to get back to that? I want no more of 'chutes. I'll have no more of 'chutes!"

"It's regulations, Lieutenant," Force reminded him. "Now, don't think that I'm riding you. The timekeeper, following his given orders, reported your failure to use the 'chute. Fact is, he has made that report twice a day for the last three days. It's up to me to see that all men and pilots going aloft are provided with 'chutes. Look here, Lieutenant, you've allowed this matter of parachutes to get your goat! You've developed a regular, deep-set parachute phobia."

"Phobia is right!" mumbled Meeker. "Phobia! Fear! The damned things have got me frightened stiff, frightened that I might once more pull a boner and use one. But I won't, Captain. Not a chance! Never! Never! I'd go down with a ship in the red, with a ship minus wings, any kind of a trouble ship, before I'd again place myself in line for the ribbing and ridicule of a whole command."

"Forget it," Captain Force said. "Ribbing and ribaldry are part and parcel of any military arm. We couldn't go on without it. It is American. It relieves the high tension and takes your mind off the fleas. As for the enlisted men and their endless song—and I realize that it's hard to take, Lieutenant—well, that's as old as arms. But it doesn't necessarily mean that they hold you in disrespect."

"Hell, no!" said Meeker. "They all love me. Damn right! They think I'm the gamest john who ever opened an umbrella."

"Just a moment, Lieutenant," Captain Force begged. "Up to date, has any enlisted man refused to ride with you?"

"No," Meeker said, hardly giving the answer any thought.

"Lieutenant," the captain related, "I've known a few flying officers with whom the enlisted men refused to hop. Take it from me, that's hell, Lieutenant. That's complete ostracism. Come on, snap out of it! You have no real weight of worries. Get your 'chute and make your patrol. At least, Lieutenant, sit on the thing."

"Good advice to the young." Lieutenant Meeker half laughed as he turned and moved toward the door. "I'll take it with me, seeing as how that's Old Man Regulation's orders, but, as I just said, I'll never trust my Army future to a parachute again. I guess I'm pretty much thin-skinned, Captain—or yellow. I can stand just so much of this and that. During the past few weeks I've had my full ration of this and that. She'll never happen again!"

A FEW weeks of routine air work followed.

"I'm not kiddin', Captain," said the timekeeper to Force. "The lieutenant seems to eat, sleep and go a-courtin' with the parachute bangin' his tail. I suspect that 'chute has become welded to him. It's no part of my so-and-so business, but Lieutenant Meeker takes said 'chute back to his quarters, after each hop, instead of leaving it in his locker. He's just made up his mind that nobody's going to shake him loose of the old white ally."

Then came the busy week of the Los Angeles Air Show, during which time the pick of the nation's airmen, and airdames, came West to contest and show their best. As usual, also as per orders from Washington, the West Coast posts of Army and Navy Air put on their part in the form of miniature war games. Again they were to shag the very old devil out of those imaginary hordes that are supposedly destined to fly some seven thousand miles of Pacific and attack—yea, drub!—the swellest flock of war birds that ever tied hard knot in a combating line of flight.

Day after day the Blue forces beat the Brown. Then the last day of the

games arrived; and the pilots of May Field had gathered in Captain Force's flying office for final orders. Captain Force explained that Colonel Justice would direct the doings via two-way radiophone from the judges' stand. Out to their ships went the May Fielders.

"Just a moment, Lieutenant Meeker," said Force. "When the day's work ends, you are to drop back to Cosmopolitan and pick up Colonel Justice. Be sure you have an extra parachute for him."

"You're not kidding me, Captain?" said Meeker.

"Certainly not," answered Force. "Them's orders, Lieutenant."

Meeker went on his way, flew west, talking to himself. You bet your life Meeker had a 'chute for the Old Man; and said Old Man was going to wear it. The show was under way when the May group arrived at Cosmopolitan, so all twenty-seven ships set down to line up and await their late afternoon spot. During the wait, Sergeant Orr, in charge of 'chutes at May, came along the line to inspect all packs. He said there were going to be some live jumps.

"Guess you guys know all about 'chutes, eh?" said Orr to the men of Meeker's ship, for Sergeant Poor and Corporal Prettyman were along again. "Who's the extra for?"

Meeker said that the colonel was going to ride back to May with that ship.

"Well, see that he wears it," said Orr. "The Old Man's plenty hard on us 'chute guys, eh? Put it on him!"

Their hour came, and the May Field Blues drove the Brown hordes out to sea; and there was much flying done. That job washed out, and the afternoon well spent, the May Field group, pursuit and bombers, formed two wings and circled Cosmopolitan, then cut for home.

Lieutenant Meeker, however, had landed.

While Colonel Justice waited and stood in the judges' stand chatting with a group of the officials, the show's master of ceremonies blah-blahed an extra added thriller. One of Hollywood's major studios—said the M.C.—was going to take advantage of the great gathering and film a ship-to-ship stunt above the field. The ship change, added the M.C, would be made at the dizzy height of seven thousand feet.

"And," added the M.C, by way of touching up the announcement with a bit of personal repartee, "if you should ask me, the height isn't the only dizzy part of the stunt. There are the two ships taking off now. In the first ship are Lieutenant Press and Speed Buoy. Speed Buoy is the boy who will change from ship to ship, via the swinging rope ladder. Watch him!

"And in the second ship is Loop Murry, that well known Hollywood daredevil. Loop will pick Speed from the swinging ladder. And when I say pick I mean pick! Keep your eye on those boys!"

Just then Lieutenant Meeker eased his big ship in close to the deadline and judges' stand. Sergeant Poor and Corporal Prettyman dropped to the ground, each to stand post before a slowly turning propeller, to keep any dizzy onlookers from strolling into those big fans. Lieutenant Meeker, extra parachute in hand, also stepped down. Second-Lieutenant Upton, Meeker's co-pilot, sat fast, behind the controls.

Meeting Colonel Justice hurrying down from the judges' stand, Meeker reported.

"Let's get going, Lieutenant," the colonel urged. "We'll get up with those stunt ships and watch them make the ladder-change, close at hand. This Lieutenant Press, late of our Air Corps, is one of my old boys. And he's plenty wild, too! Truth of the matter is, flying office grounded Press so often and for such long periods that he nearly took root. Finally, only a few months ago, he quit us for the movies. Now he's being paid for the stuff that he and the cadets used to do behind my back. That's only as it should be— Let's hurry. This should be worth watching."

REACHING the bomber's side, Lieutenant Meeker spread the straps of the 'chute. Colonel Justice, without comment, turned and backed into the harness as if elbowing into a held coat. Then he scrambled aboard. Meeker and crewmen followed and the big ship went downwind, turned back into the light west breeze, roared with loud power and took off.

The two stunt ships, flying abreast of the camera plane, were working at 6500 feet and grinding ahead into the west wind, trying to get together, when the bomber climbed up among them. Then, just to get a sure view, Meeker crowded on more climb and boosted his craft to a little higher than 7000. The Press and Speed Buoy and Loop Murry combination, of course, reversed the usual action of the thrilling ladder-change. That is, instead of lifting Speed from the lower ship's wing, with the dangling ladder, these brave men were going to bring Speed along, dangling on the rope ladder from the upper plane and deposit him on the upper wing of the lower craft. Yes, sir, that's difficult.

When the westering trio of stunt and camera ships came in above the eastern boundary of Cosmopolitan Field, the two stunt planes were flying as one. Speed Buoy's feet, dangling crazily at the full length of the tossing ladder, were reaching for—just set to touch—the upper surface of Loop Murry's top wing. They missed! Missed! The crowd gasped. Press zoomed a bit, pulled the ships apart, Speed dangled with more than a mile of open space under him, then—with that thrill carefully staged—the two ships began to get together again. Well, that happened twice more before the stunt was finally completed; and by that time the three shiploads of Hollywood boys were far beyond the west side of Cosmopolitan.

Lieutenant Meeker, still holding his 7000-foot elevation, turned his bomber into the east and put her on the line for May Field. Neither he nor the other members of his ship's complement gave further thought to the three ships in the west. Those Hollywood boys, with the day's work done, broke three ways. The camera plane started down. Loop Murry, with Speed Buoy working his way in off the wing, flew at reduced throttle, and straight ahead. But Lieutenant Press, being alone and free, fell to a bit of wild stunting. Then, in the course of that wildness, Press spotted the May Field bomber hi-tailing off to the east.

A May Field ship! One of his old buddies! Well, he'd sure have to look into this. So thinking, Press quit stunting and took up the chase of that larger, slower ship. At the end of a five-minute run Press's small craft had cut the open sky between right down to nothing. And he was a bit higher than the big ship.

Press, being Press, decided to give the eyes-front bomber boys a surprise. Hell's bells! Not one of those May Field men had spotted his approach. That was all wrong. An insult.

"Wonder who's flying this big bus," thought ex-Lieutenant Press.

Gathering lots of speed in his dive, Press dropped down from his former position just above the level of the big ship. By doing this he would put his craft in the blind spot of the bomber's tail—better to avoid being seen at the last second—and at the same time his bus would gather plenty of speed and drive for the zoom and stunt that he was planning for these careless Army men.

Onward and downward he pushed. His throttle was wide open, and his craft shook and shimmied from the crowding. Now he was just diving under the wide tail surfaces of the May Field bomber. His ship was perhaps one hundred feet lower than the other. Full gun was on the motor; and the moment to zoom and do his stuff—throw a scare into those May Field soldiers—had arrived. So ex-Lieutenant Press zoomed.

The five men in the bomber, pretty

well fagged out after the high tension of the long afternoon, were just sitting back, with Lieutenant Meeker doing what little watching and official worrying might be necessary. Suddenly, and entirely without warning, there was a hellish crack somewhere on the left side of the big ship. Glancing out, Meeker saw the tail of a ship shooting past, upward. At the same time, things seemed to be crashing against, and shattering, the control pit's glass shields.

Instinctively all members of the bomber were dodging, trying to cover up as best they could. Then, quicker than you could tell it, a mighty vibration was pumping the entire craft. Meeker knew that his left propeller had been shattered. He killed that power unit. But not quick enough. At least, he had not been able to kill it quick enough to prevent parts of its shattered propeller from being tossed into the blades of the right engine's stick. Before Meeker had time to do anything worth while both power units had humped themselves nearly free of the ship.

Along with that ship-destroying vibration came the inevitable snapping of fuel leads. With the parting of those gasoline lines, spraying the hot motors with high-test fuel under pressure, came fire. Fire aboard! Fire that lapped back from each engine's nacelle and spread its long tongues over the wings wherein the large tanks were housed. Lieutenant Meeker knew that one more May Field ship was flying its last minute of service in the dangerous calling. Here was the time and place for 'chutes; and there'd be no such thing as "too many parachutes", either.

What had happened to cause all this? Meeker knew in a flash, and only too well. That small ship—Press's zooming crate—was being piloted by a wild nut who, in his anxiety to put on a show, had entirely forgotten that his plane was dangling fully twenty feet of heavy rope ladder. And as that small ship had zoomed across the big bomber's bow, that rope ladder, with its solid oak rungs, had fouled the left propeller. That was all. It was more than enough.

Lieutenant Upton, having relinquished his control-pit seat when the colonel came aboard, was out in the gunner's pit on the ship's nose. He had been snoozing, crouched low in the pit, and thus miraculously weathered the storm of flying propeller splinters. Now Upton came to a stand, one foot on the pit's gunwale, and turned.

"Jump!" Meeker yelled, and waved. Upton dived.

Sergeant Poor came forward through the crowded inter-bay passage.

"What say, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"Jump!" said Meeker. "You and Corporal Prettyman—jump! I'll hold her flat till you get away. Make it fast!"

MEEKER did a fine job of air work then. Robbed of power, but with his control surfaces still intact, he pulled the big ship up to level flight, flattened her out, stalled her there and let her settle. The back-sweep of smoke and flames was checked. The fire eddied straight up—but the heat in that control pit was killing. All the time Meeker watched over his shoulder, watched two enlisted men wave, step off and dive.

"Jump, sir!" Meeker then yelled to his superior. "I can't hold her much longer! Jump!"

Instead, Colonel Justice pulled the auxiliary control wheel against his chest, taking over and saying:

"You jump, Mr. Meeker. I'll take her down— Jump!"

Meeker shook the commanding officer off the control, yelling above the swish of flame:

"I'm in command! Jump, sir! It's my ship— I say jump!"

Colonel Justice, having failed in that one try, knew who was right. Passing, he wrung Meeker's left shoulder in a grip that was nothing short of affectionate. He said—

"You hurry right along. Lieutenant."

Then one colonel went to the rear open pit and jumped.

Lieutenant Meeker did not hurry right along. That is, he did not desert ship and jump. He flew her down. The scattered homes and ranches of East Los Angeles and nearby towns were below that fire-ship. Perhaps that's why Meeker stuck so gamely to his post. And then again, perhaps it was simply because of his promise that he'd never again use a 'chute.

How he brought that ship to its final crash in a truck gardener's cabbage patch is something that surpasses all lay understanding. The fact that he did so, then got thrown clear of the fire, is now part of May Field's epic history. At any rate, within half an hour of reaching ground, a cruising police car of the Los Angeles radio patrol had picked Meeker up, rushed him to town and deposited his unconscious form at the receiving door of the Georgia Street Emergency Hospital. That was fast work.

Back at May Field, with the hands of the clock getting along toward eight, Colonel Justice and Captain Force sat in the flying office. They were waiting for a call from Georgia Street. It came shortly after eight. It was a very favorable report, saying that Lieutenant Meeker was off the white table. Both legs had been broken, also the right arm. Burns, however, were only secondary. There were other injuries, but not too bad. His head, said the report, was in very good condition.

With a look of relief, Colonel Justice pushed the phone to one side.

"He'll fly again," he said to Captain Force. "Thank God for that. The man is brave. But why, in the name of reason, did he stick with that ship?"

"Some time ago, right here in this office," related Captain Force, "Lieutenant Meeker told me that he'd never again use a 'chute, sir. I guess he's as good as his word, to say the least."

There was a knock on the door. Captain Force told the knocker to come in. Sergeant Orr, a parachute in hand, stood there on the threshold. It was a dirty, charred mess of 'chute, but a regulation piece of equipment nevertheless.

"I got this from the cops at Georgia Street," the sergeant said. "It's Lieutenant Meeker's. I thought you'd want to see it, here at flying office. The radiocar cops figure that Lieutenant Meeker went through the pile-up, in the cabbage field, with this 'chute in front of his head."

"That, Sergeant," said Colonel Justice, "is not the right usage for a 'chute, is it?"

"That, sir," said Orr, "is about all the use this here 'chute could serve."

"What do you mean, Sergeant?" the C.O. asked. "Explain."

Sergeant Orr dropped the remains of the 'chute on the desk between the colonel and Captain Force.

"It's lucky, maybe," Orr said, "that nobody took a close look at this 'chute before I got there and claimed it. Look here, sir."

Sergeant Orr opened the canvas envelope's folds.

Where there should have been a charred pack of silk there was just one, well folded, regulation, O.D. Army blanket.

Colonel Justice got up to pace. He said softly—

"Well, I'll be damned!" Then he paced some more.

"Sergeant Orr," the colonel finally asked, "how's your forgetting apparatus?"

"It's jake, sir," said Orr.

"Good," said the colonel. "I'll keep this 'chute. And I'm going to give you a few days off for forgetting."

"And as for my official report, sir?" Captain Force asked. "After all, sir, regulations say that a parachute, not a blanket must be carried."

"Right you are, Captain," agreed the colonel. "But you remember what the boys used to say during the war: 'Army orders are made to be broken.' Tonight we'll break a few."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

SOME time ago we ran a highly interesting piece of personal reminiscence by Talbot Mundy, entitled "A Jungle Sage". The author, out of extensive first-hand acquaintance, discussed the African witch doctor and his secret arts, suggesting that the savage black man often possesses more exact scientific and medical knowledge than the white man ever dreams.

There is an African novel in the present issue, and while this rather speculative topic has small bearing on the current story, the moment is a good one for inclusion of this letter:

Liberty, New York

I was particularly interested in Talbot Mundy's reminiscences of Africa entitled "A Jungle Sage", in the March 15th *Adventure*. The statement concerning the witch doctors, "that such people belong to days gone by," caught my eye.

This statement reminded me of a series of articles written by René Thevenin, a French scientist, for a weekly magazine, in which he discussed the origins of our present science. In one of these articles Professor Thevenin made the statement that the black race was not a young race, but was a very old one, which was in the process of a far advanced decay. At their zenith, according to Thevenin, the blacks had possessed a superior civilization. It may well be that these African witch doctors, of whose powers Talbot Mundy speaks, are the possessors of some remnants of a superior healing art, remnants which are perhaps the sole indication today of the probable past greatness of the black race.

THE method of reducing fever by means of damp cloths, used in the story by Oketch the Rainmaker, is known to white men. This is what is known as "cold packs", and is known to chiropractors, osteopaths, naturopaths and also members of the regular school of medicine, and was originated, I believe, by an Austrian whose name, as near as I can remember, was Priesnetz. It was from the teachings of Priesnetz that Father Sebastian Kneip, a famous German hydrotherapist, developed his method of healing disease mainly by the use of water. Where Oketch got his cold packs from, I do not know. Some might say from missionaries; but setting broken bones merely by pressing on certain nerves is something else again. Such procedure would require knowledge of anatomy of a high order. I am not prepared to state that setting broken bones by nerve pressure is known to white surgeons.

Mr. Mundy's account of the cures wrought by these witch doctors lends color to the statement made above, that these individuals possess information which has come down to them out of a possible glorious past of the race.

—A. GEORGE

SPEAKING with the voice of authority, a comrade adds a few words to a recent discussion:

Department of Commerce
Bureau of Fisheries
Houma, La.

In your March issue there was a very interesting letter by Captain Charles H. Coe on the subject of certain reptiles exposing themselves to the sunshine.

In the Louisiana swamps and bayous the Cottonmouth moccassin and various other water snakes habitually climb to high root, log or bank and expose themselves to the sunshine. They will not usually be found on these spots when it is raining or cloudy. Also the same snake will occupy the same sunshiny perch at about the same hour day after day until he is killed, chased from the immediate locality, or some high water carries away his sun parlor.

—FORREST V. DURAND

AMONG the many extraordinary letters that come into this office, the following stands out as one of the most remarkable I've ever read. It comes from Edgar Young, a member of the Writers' Brigade, of the Ask Adventure staff, and an old hand around the Camp-Fire.

Big Stone Gap, Va.

Some twenty years have passed since I wrote my first story for *Adventure*. By the light of this Camp-Fire I rose to my feet and orated my piece. I told where I originated and in what places I had earned the right to call myself an adventurer.

Five years passed and that issue of the magazine came into the hands of a certain man. This man was located at the time in Antwerp, Belgium, and he wrote to me. I remember the letter very clearly. He said he had been extremely interested in what I said in Camp-Fire about myself. I had stated that I was born and raised at Big Stone Gap, in the mountains of Virginia. This man said he had spent considerable time in and around this town. I had told of hitting tropical trails south of the Rio Grande and this man told me he had hit certain of these trails himself and called off the landmarks so that I knew he had done so. He went on to say that he had had some of the most peculiar adventures that had befallen any living man and that he was a man without a name and without a country and that I would never be able to guess who he was.

For fifteen years the letter of this man has puzzled me. As he saw my original remarks through the medium of Camp-Fire and wrote his letter in direct reply to those remarks it seems fitting that I should now reply to him here and it is only fair to the present gathering to explain why this comrade sat in the shadows with averted face and handed me the hardest riddle it has been my lot to receive.

For fifteen years this thing has bobbed up in my mind at intervals, bothering me. It is only during the past few days that additional information chanced upon while again living at Big Stone Gap makes it possible for me to attempt an answer to this man who spoke to me from the dim shadows of the Camp-Fire.

All of this would be meaningless to the rest of you without a bit of explanation on my part. I am merely making a reply to one who sat with us and queried me. I do not wish to injure anyone in any way. Perhaps my intention is the reverse. It may be possible that one of you can be of use to pass the word along.

It's a long way back to the beginning, more than thirty years. Coal was discovered in the Cumberland Mountains near the town of Three Forks, Virginia. Two railroads started building in that direction and people stampeded to Three Forks to get located near the coalfields. Lots were staked out and sold for high prices. The name of Three Forks was changed to Big Stone Gap. But the railroads passed on up through Stone Mountain, and the mining companies began building their own towns. The bottom dropped out of the boom at Big Stone Gap and the town became like a deserted mining town of the West.

Nonetheless two sons of a noted Philadelphia millionaire came to live there. One was twenty-four years of age and the other twenty-seven and each was general manager of a huge coal company owned by their family on up through the big gap in Stone Mountain. At the end of three years there were more than 16,000 men employed at the various coal mines and coke plants. At the age of thirty the older of the boys married a girl up north and brought her south with him. The other brother became engaged to the daughter of a wealthy St. Louis family and had a house erected near their former home. The house was finished, completely furnished, and the wedding was to take place in a month. He was now twenty-seven years old.

On the morning of October 14, 1903, this young multi-millionaire rode away from Big Stone Gap in the direction of Stonega and that evening did not return to his home. His horse, a bay with a blaze in its forehead, was found at nightfall on the wagon road between Appalachia and Norton, standing with its feet entangled in the reins and the young man's coat hanging on the saddle horn. The horse was taken to Big Stone Gap and the older brother notified.

He immediately got busy on the phone. From the mines he learned that his brother had merely paused there that morning, stating that he was to meet a brother of the company land agent between Appalachia and Norton and inspect some outlying property. The man he was to meet was called on the phone and he claimed he did not meet the young man, saying that he had not been feeling very well and did not go.

It had always been customary for someone to ride with either of the brothers when they went on inspection trips into the mountains. The reason for this was that much of the coal land had been obtained from mountaineer owners at ridiculously low prices and that many people in the mountains held a grudge against the two young millionaires and also against the land agent and the brother who assisted him, both mountain men, ruthless, and according to standards of that time, good land agents. Some mountaineers who returned from State's prison after doing several years at hard labor claimed the millionaires and their land agents framed them and got them in jail to get their land while they were locked up. This is inserted to show a certain phase of the affair.

Upon being notified of the details the father in Philadelphia gathered some of the best detectives in the country and brought them with him on a special train. William J. Burns and picked men, the Pinkertons, other noted sleuths were on the ground within two days. The older brother had put out a reward of $25,000 the day after the disappearance and this was increased to $55,000 by the father. Newspaper reporters hurried to Big Stone Gap from all over the country. Seventy-five crack reporters were filing copy at the little Western Union office at Big Stone Gap. The search was carried on systematically. Before being allowed to start out each searcher was armed with a rake and lined up with a row of other men. Long lines of men combed the mountains day and night for weeks. All of these searches started in the ravine near where the horse of the young man was found.

A Spiritist happened along and told the family and detectives he could make a table rap and could foretell where the body would be found. Questions were cunningly put to the table. The replies indicated the body would be found fifty feet from a certain boulder in the original ra-

vine, Roaring Fork Holler. Word of this séance caused a wild stampede to this canyon and it was again gone over by inches with rakes. No body was found.

On May 8, 1904, after the reward had been withdrawn, two boys looking for strayed cattle found the body of a man dressed in riding clothes, boots, Stetson, exactly fifty-five feet from the boulder where the Spiritist said it would be found. The body lay on its back, a pistol lay near the outstretched right hand, a pair of pince-nez glasses lay near the head. The older brother was notified and he came with a large party of men from Big Stone Gap. He identified the clothing, pistol, glasses. The body was decomposed beyond sure recognition. One shell had been fired from the revolver and the bullet was recovered from the dead man's chest.

Only one thing askew: the left hand was missing. The coroner arrived from Norton and picked a jury from the bystanders. They spoke about the missing hand and decided that "some varmint, possibly a dog" had carried it off. On this left hand the young man had worn a signet ring engraved with his initials.

The coroner's jury, in their uncertainty, rendered a verdict of accidental death.

During the search for the young millionaire a report leaked out that in consequence of a serious illness he was actually unable to contract a marriage. This was known. What the coroner's jury did not know was that the young man had made a will in favor of his fiancée just one month prior to his disappearance. Also they did not know that on that particular morning he had the negro boy lock up the dogs so they could not follow him. Had they known these facts in addition it is possible the verdict would have read "suicide".

Another fact unknown to them was carefully guarded by the family. A few days after the disappearance the left hand of a human being was sent to the father at Stonega by mail from Whitesburg, Kentucky just across the Big Black Mountain. This hand bore the engraved signet ring of the missing man. His mother had arrived with the father and also a younger brother had accompanied them. The entire family closely examined the hand and decided it was *not* his hand. William J. Burns was taken into their confidence and he detailed one of his best men to go over to Whitesburg and try to pick up a clue. This man lived over there for almost a year under an assumed name but learned nothing.

A letter accompanied the hand, stating that the writer had cut it off and had the lad in hiding. No mention of ransom was made. The detective had scarcely reached Whitesburg before a similar letter arrived from New York stating that the missing man was being spirited about the country. Other letters came from Chicago and St. Louis and finally from Mexico City. Detectives were sent to all these cities and nothing came of it.

The case remains a mystery to this day.

Now, I was in California at that time. I read about the case in the papers. I went next to Mexico, thence to Central America, and then to South America where I did my stuff in varied places. One day I accidentally saw on the streets of Rio de Janeiro a man so like the supposedly dead young millionaire that it startled me. I remarked this to a pardner who was with me. We saw this same man next day on the Avenue Central and he dodged across the street. My pardner said it was someone else and that I had made him nervous by staring at him. I did not see him any more in Rio after that second time. I marked it up to a similarity in appearance. Then I got that puzzling letter in answer to what I had said in Camp-Fire—"strange adventures, can't ever tell them, man without a name, without a country, was in Big Stone Gap for years, have hit the same trails you have in Latin America, you will never be able to figure out who I am . . ."

I have wondered for fifteen years. I incline to wonder no longer. The case is as dead as the Charley Ross mystery. The victim had no wrong to requite, no crime to flee. But, murder? Suicide? Or a perfect, traceless disappearance?

If the comrade of the mysterious letters still listens from the outer shadows let him take this as a proffered handclasp and greeting full of understanding. He was a man who got a rough deal from life. It's pretty tough to do without a country, without a name. He's played the game as the cards fell to him, and if it were possible to meet him here in Camp-Fire, where I have many loyal friends, I'd go to the mat for him with all my heart.

I wonder—how he's making out.

—EDGAR YOUNG

A FEW notes on smuggling in the Bahamas:

New York, N. Y.

Let's all shed a few crocodile tears for the starving rum-runners. The certainty of Repeal knocked the West Indian liquor smugglers right off the Christmas tree.

Most of them have gone into kidnaping, dope running or Chinese smuggling. A few of the more degraded have hit a lucrative but risky game in supplying Chinese girls to wealthy Orientals in big cities of the seaboard.

The girls bring very high prices from the Chinamen who hold themselves above the cheap white girls they can get with their money. Rum-runners steal the girls from the Chinese colonies of Cuba, mostly Havana. The practice is to get away and run for the Bahama shoals—to dodge among the mangrove flats until radio and patrol search has died down.

The Bahamas are but an hour's air run and a few hours in a smuggler from Miami, but are little known to Americans. They are still mostly wild—for the very good reason that no fresh water is found on them. Birds, coons and rats learn to drink the collected dew at the base of airplants. Man soon gets sick on this, although it is hard to get enough to quench one's thirst.

The flora and fauna of the islands, called cays locally, and keys in Florida, depends upon the height above mean tide. Some of the islands are merely tide-flats overgrown with mangroves—completely wet at high tides. Others a few inches above the moon-tide are physiologically dry—

that is, soaked in salt. Fringed with mangroves, the higher parts are a jungle of interwoven buttonwood and several kinds of cactus. Cactus at times grows with its roots in the water, but as dry as on the most arid desert, because the water is salt.

Most cooking and heating on inhabited islands of the upper West Indies (and in Florida, until oil got cheap) is done with charcoal. This coal is burned in great piles, from the buttonwood logs, by Conch (island negro) burners who live by themselves on some lonely key until the whole place is denuded of buttonwood, when a boat comes for the tons of charcoal. They must run a crude still constantly for water.

When we were down there surveying, our party always had one still man who fired the 60 gal. gasoline-drum outfit all day, to make 5 or 6 gallons of fresh water for cooking and drinking. Sundays he always had a barrel of molasses "mash" ready and ran it off before we got up.

Such is the land where the smugglers hide out with their precious living cargo until a clear run to port seems possible.

Many a bloody battle results on these layoffs. The captain rules by sleepless might and bullets. The crew kills time by drinking. Some of them smoke the blood-lust inspiring "reefers". After a couple of days of that, they are just in the mood to make sport with the cargo. Should these ruffians lay hands on the girls, the captain may as well throw them to the sharks, because the price is for undamaged goods. Several captains have been rushed and killed. Dozens of the thick-witted crews have been shot down.

—ROBERT L. BACON

ONE of the first problems confronting me when I came into this office was the wide prevalence of a certain idea about *Adventure*. It was an idea I thought abhorrent to everything the magazine stands for. It bothered me until I finally sat down and wrote a long and emphatic circular letter, and had the letter copied on the mimeograph and mailed to every writer whose name and address are on file. That letter went out to scotch a heresy.

It unequivocally denied the existence here of a "closed corporation", publishing a magazine whose doors were barred to the young and promising beginner.

Adventure's doors are wide open to any young writer who can make the grade. It is not an easy one, for our writers have set a high standard in the course of the magazine's history, and the present staff has no intention of relaxing its demands. We are rightly proud of this standard, and proud of the writers who have created it by the excellence of their work. They, as well as the beginners, will have to measure up to it in the future as in *Adventure's* proudest days; and we shall continue to cooperate with them as well as the beginners, to the end that every story bought by this magazine will be the best story available in its field.

For the benefit of those of the Writers' Brigade who may have missed my message, and for the reassurance of you readers, I quote in part from the circular letter:

Adventure wants good stories, is begging for them. Note that I say *good* stories. Fair filler stories can be summoned wholesale, like good sheep dutifully, responding, merely by waving the checkbook. I'm not hunting for them; I want the kind of a story I can cheer about, and tell the company about, and feel like stopping the presses for so I may include an announcement to the readers. Who the author is, or his past or his habits or the company he keeps, are of no least consequence. Show me the story that I, as editor of this magazine, can pronounce good, and I'll inquire the author's name only for the purpose of filling in the voucher for his check.

There remains the question of what this editor considers a good story. Perhaps I can best put it indirectly by saying that a good *Adventure* story is one the reader puts down feeling, say, "By God, there was a *man!* I could follow a guy like that anywhere."

You see, there is an emotion involved in the ideal story. When our hero is a capable cowboy or cop or seaman or Mountie, and he has a job to do and goes and does it, it is all very nice and commendable, but the news reporters handle such cases quite adequately. An adventure writer is concerned with a more fundamental and complex set-up: why is our hero a cowboy, what drove him from the farm he was born on? Why a cop and not a plumber? What dream led him to follow the sea; what inarticulate ideal enlisted him in the R. C. M. P.? The tally of jobs well done is for the ledgers and log books. The dreams of men and their atavistic yearnings, their hopes for fame or wealth or love or good repute and their ways of working toward the goal, to triumph or to death—these are the things of *Adventure's* stories. Perhaps of all good stories—they are there, implicit in the characters and their responses to stimuli, whether or not the author drags them out for examination. They are valid Emotion, the antithesis of woodenness in story-telling.

The magazine's name itself is a formula complete. ADVENTURE!

I shall close this small sermon on the same note on which I closed the letter—with high hopes and an ardent heart, and a valiant toast before the Camp-Fire.

Comrades, I give you—*Adventure!*

—W. C.

ASK ADVENTURE

Free information and advice you can't get elsewhere

Do you want to visit Indo-China armed with a gun and a camera? Are you studying the habits of the American Indian? Do you want to become a rancher? Would you like to vacation in the South Seas? Or do you just want to spend your afternoons playing baseball? Ask Adventure experts have answered questions on all these subjects in this issue. Maybe somebody can think of a question to stick them—but it's a hard thing to do.

Indo-China

YOU can get all the equipment you need at Saigon—but you'll have to travel a bit to find your tigers.

Request:—"I am leaving next month for a six months trip to French Indo-China. The trip is a photographic expedition. The intention being to make a semi-travelogue, combining a story with native actors and their customs. There is to be some game hunting as I now understand it.

We are to have the full co-operation of the French provincial authorities. I presume every comfort and convenience will be accorded us. However, I am a little concerned as to eating, and drinking water, clothing and firearms. I am also wondering about the packing and conditioning of my equipment.

Will you give me whatever information your experience dictates that I need for my personal well-being?"

—GIFFORD S. CHAMBERLAIN, San Gabriel, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—Let me assure you that French Indo-China isn't as wild and woolly as you seem to be expecting.

If you are going producing with native actors intelligent enough to listen to direction, you won't be working very far from Saigon. Away in the interior the dumbness of the back jungly folks will astound you.

All the same, three days out of Saigon you can get some of the best—and safest—tiger shooting in Asia. There are two registered guides, sponsored by the "Bureau de Tourismo" in Saigon. They supply tents, grub, firearms, everything, for $25 a day. It will pay you to steal some time off and go on a hunt yourself.

As to food and water. Don't worry about food. Anything cooked is safe. It may be loaded with all the appalling dirt that every oriental cook manages to handle into his cooking; but it won't hurt you. Look out for salads and all uncooked things. Typhoid and cholera and dysentery germs come in large packages in the green leaves. If you must have salads, have them disinfected in permanganate solution—and see that it is done. An Indo-Chinese camp servant will lie his head off, swearing it has been attended to, just to save himself trouble.

Water is the real menace. If you find white men drinking it, it will be safe enough—unless you happen to be particularly susceptible. But natives, without any manner of doubt, have developed an immunity to bacteria that would knock a white man cold over night. Wherever you aren't sure of your water have it boiled—and *see* that it is boiled for fifteen minutes. Or, where boiling is inconvenient, use halazone tablets to chlorinate it. You can buy halazone in U. S. A. or from any British port where they handle the Burroughs, Welcome Medical Outfits. Drug stores in Saigon will have a French variation of the same thing under another name.

Finally, I envy you your trip. I wish I could come along. I shall be glad to know whether there might be anything more that I could tell you. Glad to know how you proceed anyway.

A belated thought. Clothing. It is a rule. Never buy in U. S. A. for foreign trips. You can always get everything you need for the country you are going into at the local port of debarkation. At Saigon you will find everything you require—guns, ammunition, clothing, shoes, cameras, film, medicines. Everything.

Annamese jewelry stores in the bazaar streets sell peachy looking white sapphires that make the swellest expensive-appearing gifts when you get back home; just like diamonds. But jade is cheaper right in the New York hock shops.

Once more, I envy you, and I shall be glad to hear how you get along.

Lo, the Poor Indian

WERE the Indians more brutal than the "civilized" white man? Our expert doesn't think so.

Request:—"1. Did any North American tribes practice cannibalism?

2. If so, what ones?

3. Which tribes were the nearest to being civilized, in manner of government, moral codes, and religion; eastern or western?

4. Were the "Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy" any more addicted to cruelty to their captives than other tribes?

I have read considerable about Indians and conditions at the time of the white man's invasion, and realize that all savage tribes enjoy watching captives under torture; but this is the

first time I ever ran across a statement alluding to cannibalism, in the American Indian."

—C. B. MCDUFFEE, Elmira, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—Cannibalism *was* practised by the Indians of the East, but not as a means of everyday method of keeping the stomach full. It was a ceremonial form of obtaining strength from an enemy. The Iroquois and some of their Algonkian neighbors did eat various parts of the bodies of their enemies.

The Iroquois did *not* hunt their enemies for the cook pot. Perhaps over a period of years hundreds of captives were taken, but if you will delve into the number of warriors going out on a war party, you can readily understand why, hundreds of captives would not be held at any one time in Iroquois villages. As a matter of fact, war parties were lucky if they took more than a dozen prisoners—and kept them. Even small white boys and white women have been known to elude their Iroquois captors.

Torture among the Iroquois was a form of testing the fortitude of an individual. Young Iroquois, and other tribes too, played at torture games from boyhood to harden them against the time when *they* would be called upon to face their enemy captors and deride them for being amateurs in the game of making a captive beg for mercy. And don't think for a moment all captives of the Iroquois were killed.

Question number three is a difficult one to answer. It involves too many standards and definitions. By *our* standards of civilization in *all* its aspects, I'd say the Puebloan people were more nearly civilized, but no one tribe combines all the elements of what we fondly term civilization. Coming right down to brass tacks, our vaunted civilization is mechanical and nothing more. Except for our pyramided accumulation of knowledge we are quite on par with our brown skinned brethren who roamed the countryside in a breech clout and a robe. Our advantage lies in the fact we kill scientifically and on a more wholesale plan. Our superstitions and ceremonies are more obscure and formal but lack the deep underlying tone of *knowledge* of such beliefs which our Indian confreres had. In short, I think the definitions of civilization and morals, as well as codes of ethics and government, are more or less personal and individual and cannot be applied as a blanket to a miscellaneous group of tribes such as those which composed the population of these United States . . . or the world for that matter.

As to number four, no. The Shawnee, Huron, Illinois, Delaware, Erie, Apache, Pawnee, and others were equally cruel in their own way. I will admit the Iroquois knew many nice little tricks of torturing people—but let's not discuss them. It might be necessary to ring in a few comparative examples of civilized white men, including a U. S. Senator who thought it might be advisable to offer rewards for Indian scalps. And as you know, a man didn't always need to be dead to have his scalp removed. Or some of the torture methods employed by our present society upon their prisoners in the jails. The slow torture of the stake was short compared to the months of mental agony caused to the criminal in the death house and his presumably innocent family. The first Indian tried in Pennsylvania was asked whether he would rather be burned or hung and in reply told the court if it was all the same to them he'd rather be tomahawked or shot. He was promptly informed by the lawyer that such a fate was impossible because it was illegal.

Draw your own conclusions.

Ranch Life

HOW soon can a farm-hand learn to be a cow-puncher?

Request; "Please inform me as to the serverity of life and work among the ranch-hands of the Western ranches, especially as regards work on the cattle ranches of Arizona.

Have been raised on a farm, have hunted and lived out-of-doors a great deal, worked on a common labor gang with pick, shovel, and rock-hammer.

If you will be so kind, will also appreciate greatly, your informing me as to the relative difficulty of obtaining work in that state at present time.

Any information that you will give me surely will be greatly appreciated, as I think that I would like to move to that part of the country, and work."

—WILLIAM MCKNIGHT, Morristown, Tennessee

Reply, by Mr. Gordon Gordon:—Anyone who has been reared on a farm won't find ranch life so severe.

In fact, ranches are much the same as the farms of the South and East in that the work is endless—just one job after another. Of course, for the first few days, the newcomer won't be able to sit down very often. Riding mustangs is a mean business for the Easterner who has been accustomed to the smooth gait of riding horses. And the sun isn't any joke either. A blustering cold night will give away to a day that is scorching hot. The glare of the calechi in the summer time is blinding and the little sand or dust storms that whirl out of no place are disagreeable.

But aside from points that are indigenous to every job, ranch life is about the same as agricultural work any place. There are fences to be repaired, cattle or sheep to tend, etc.

Chances for jobs on the rangeland are rather scarce now.

The cattle and sheep "bosses" haven't been making any money for several years—just the same as almost everyone else. The herds have been cut down and that means that fewer cowhands are being employed. And those that do have jobs aren't getting much more than their meals and a place in the bunkhouse.

But then there's always one more place for someone who is strong and who has enough money to keep moving from one place to another until he finds a vacancy. The beginner in the cow or sheep business, of course, can't expect much as he is virtually a dead loss to the "top hand" until he learns the tricks of the trade.

Signals

HOW to fool 'em in baseball.

Request:—"I am just beginning a season as the coach of a ship's team and not having a great knowledge of the game except that learned in books, I would be indebted to you if you could be able to give me a little help about signals.

Every authority I can find has stated that a simple set of signals should be arranged but none of them have stated just how these signals are to be made.

Would you please inform me what method I might use in signalling from the bench to the field, from the batter to the field and from the side line coaches to the runners.

Also a set of signals to be used by the catcher to the pitcher and basemen in making throws to the bases and signals to be relayed from the infielders to the outfielders.

—J. A. PRICHARD, U. S. S. Arizona, San Pedro, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Frederick G. Lieb:—Have your letter of November 26 in regard to baseball signals for your team. The more simple signals you have the better. In the big leagues, where they play twenty-two games a season with each of their opponents, they have three or four sets of signals. One move may seem one thing one day; the next day it may mean something exactly the opposite.

Signals from the bench may be made in several ways. McGraw used to signal to his coaches or direct to his pitchers, by rubbing right eye, left eye, brushing the back of his hand across his nose, nervously twitching at his belt, things which look naturally, but which might mean a fast ball, a curve, a pitch on the outside, etc.

The Giants used to have a certain signal when the hit and run play was on. It would be flashed to the runner on first base by a jerk of the cap from the bench or something like that. If the batter wishes to take off the play he drew the bat through his fingers toward the hitting end. If he wanted to put it on again, he drew it back toward the handle.

Catchers must have quick signals to the pitcher on what is happening behind the twirler. A quick slap on the right knee may mean runner on first is taking a long lead off base. Change it next day to a quick scratch across left breast. Touch chin for runner off second; raise chin, jerk head to right or left all may have a meaning. There is not much signalling on relayed throws from outfield.

These players had best be coached who will take relays on balls hit to right, left, etc., under various conditions.

An Inaccessible Island

IT'S not easy to vacation in the South Seas, but it's worth it when you get there.

Request:—"I have planned on a vacation for next summer in the South Sea Islands.

I would like to spend from two weeks to one month on one of the Islands. Is there any special island of the group which you could recommend to me for such a visit? Are there any white men living on these islands besides yourself?

What do they do for a living? What constitutes a day on an island? What connections can a person get in regard to transportation to and from the Island? What do you recommend to bring for a one month stay? Is there any special month or season when the islands are more enjoyable?"

—ALBERT G. KIRCHER, Freeport, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. William McCreadie:—You will need to spend three weeks in Fiji as the mail boats run by at Suva coming south on the 3rd and then three weeks later they arrive from Sydney via Auckland going north to San Francisco. If expense is your big consideration the very best you can do is to come via Vancouver.

Suva is on the island of Viti Levu, the largest of the group and has over 100,000 people on it with four big sugar mills and other factories. We have around 1800 white folks in Suva and many more in other parts or a total for the group of around 4000, with 75,000 Indians and 83,000 native Fijians, 3500 halfcastes and 1200 Chinese, with a few Japanese. The whites are employed either by the Government, or by the big Sugar Company or in stores or by planters who grow coconuts from which copra is made by drying the meat of the nuts. Work starts from 7.30 in the workshops to 9 in the Gov't offices and to 4 P. M. in the latter and 5 to 5.15 in the former.

Stores work from 8 to 5, all with one hour, from 1 to 2 for lunch. The best months to visit are from May to October. The mail boats only call at Suva but some cargo boats call at Lambasa, Levuka or Lautoka. The latter is on this island and has the second biggest sugar mills in the world. Lambasa is a sugar town and Levuka is the old capital on the island of Ovalau near Viti Levu. Small steamers or motor boats travel between all the ports including Taveuni called "The Garden of Fiji," with a lake up on the hills.

If you come you can travel now by the new transinsular road for some 200 miles by charabanc or motor car. A new and comfortable bus started on the run yesterday. I would recommend a run round the island by road spending some days at each stopping, and then finish by a boat run to Levuka.

MRS. EDNA P. WELLS has been selected as Ask Adventure expert for the states of Colorado and Wyoming. No one could be better fitted for the position than Mrs. Wells, since she worked on the same department for years with her husband, the late William Wells. It is with confidence and the cordiality of long acquaintance that we welcome her to our ranks.

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply will** be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment.

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The next issue of Adventure

IT IS all of a year since Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens last rode over the hill in *Adventure* to see, in their insatiable curiosity, what lay on the other side—and to become abruptly involved in mystery and danger and gallant high adventure. The partners appeared last in an exciting serial, "Rifled Gold". This latest story was originally planned for serial publication also, but instead it is coming to you intact, complete in the June issue—a long, absorbing, swiftly moving novel of cattle country plot and counterplot, romance and gunplay, courage and unquenchable Western humor. It was too good to hold out even in part.

This time Hashknife and Sleepy come riding over the hill into the cattle town of Rimrock, where robbery and murder have the community by its ears in terror and dread. A friend lies slain by a hand unknown; and the partners begin, in their bland, innocent and deadly efficient way, to take the town apart in search of its sinister secret.

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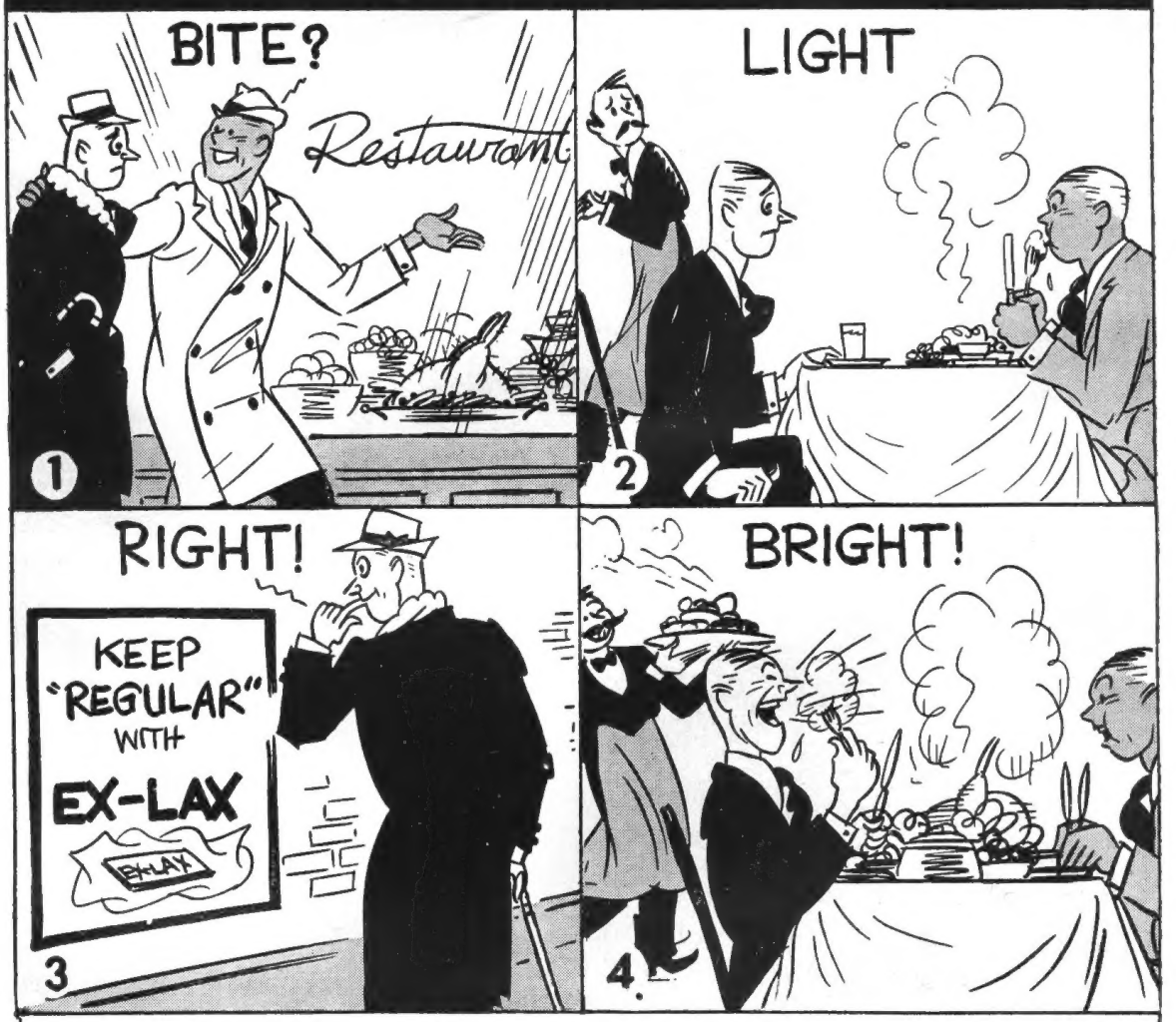
HUNCHES AND LUNCHES

BY JEFFERSON MACHAMER



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